

**FIN-DE-SIÈCLE HORRORS:
WOMEN, STREETWALKING, SPECTACLE
AND CONTAGION
IN LONDON SLUM NARRATIVES, 1880-1900**

SUBMITTED BY

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ABSTRACT

I aim to make an important contribution to academic discussion of the modes of women's presence in the literatures of modernity, by approaching documentary texts and fictions describing impoverished women, from the perspective of consumption and phantasmagoric cultures. Cultural historians have tended to debate representations of the consuming practices of socially privileged women in the city's leisure spaces. My project draws on different sets of material, engaging with cultural and historical approaches, to examine elite conceptualizations of impoverished women's engagement with urban aesthetics.

Opening up critical space through an emphasis on the malleability of images of reversion in late-Victorian social discourse, my thesis reveals how female exposure to the city's phantasmagoria and subjection to the touch of the working-class male, were commonly represented in terms of contamination precipitating moral and organic corruption. In exploring such formulations, I outline intersections between tropes of feminine monstrosity - encoding compatible social, sexual and racial meanings - discernible in fin-de-siècle slum fictions and sociological reports, and those present in works of French naturalism, in graphic art, and in gothic adventure literatures.

By attending to a dialectic of dazzling surface and putrid depths, I trace the positioning of the working-class 'girl' and the marital-maternal body in layers of time, including evolutionary time, and their implication in the circulation of disease and in the flow of foul anatomical matter. My work, then, develops insights around female mobility and the prostitute as urban figure, and contributes to a number of debates in the scholarship of modernity.

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PART ONE

Introduction

The thesis pursued in the following chapters is simple enough: that anxiety regarding impoverished women's desire and consumption in an expanding commodity culture was expressed through tropes of phantasmagoric infection, pathology, regression, and bodily horror, and that these tropes are present in a number of narratives written in England in the 1880s and 1890s. As this opening sentence indicates, my original contribution to knowledge constitutes an extended exercise in reading against the grain, by approaching a number of texts addressing urban poverty from the perspective of consumption. My work for this project also includes new empirical research with the notebooks of the Booth Collection held at the London School of Economics and Political Science. In reading for feminine consumption in what may sometimes appear singular places, this thesis takes inspiration from, and develops, scholarly debates around modernity, in which women are figured as consumers – not only as shoppers, but as consumers of the sights of the city - exercisers of scopic desire and power.

The chapters which follow draw upon interlocking cultural histories, but in a sense their essential theoretical spine is formed by a range of scholarly texts concerned with the long-debated issue of women's urban mobility during the nineteenth century. This scholarship intersects with histories of the sanitary, the administrative, the commercial and the philanthropic. The formulations produced by the early twentieth-century cultural historian and theorist Walter Benjamin of commercial aesthetics as dreamscape or 'phantasmagoria', and his utilization of figures symbolic of modernity's commodifications, such as the flâneur and the prostitute, are vital to the critical and historical framework of my thesis. Benjamin's interpretations of modernity have been greatly influential both in dominant discourses of the modern city, and in feminist

challenges to those discourses.¹ I will now discuss Benjamin's ideas and related scholarship addressing the feminine consumption and urban mobility, because I so frequently invoke these ideas and 'think with' them as I build my thesis.

Benjamin's study of the architecture and optics of the commercial city have been significant to scholarship addressing the development of commodity capitalism, and are central to his masculinist definitions of 'the modern'. He conceived covered shopping arcades of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as nascent zones for the fetishization of the commodity. That is to say, the exchange and display value attributed to the wares exhibited in the arcades obscured their production value – their source in often exploitative labour. These early shopping environments hosted optical illusions such as panoramas and phantasmagorias: the term 'phantasmagoria' is used by both Karl Marx and Walter Benjamin, respectively, to describe the illusory character of commodities in the market and in display environments.² Vitally, the arcade was the site at which the elite male might loiter, and consume, whether through purchase of commodities, including the sexual services of women, or through his consumption of the sights of the city.

Depictions of the developing commercial spaces of the city, and the anxiety of documentary and fiction writers around female enjoyment of commercial leisure activities, characterize a number of the texts to which this thesis attends. Benjamin's tracing of the exportation of the architecture and display logic of the arcades to sites of

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999) pp. 14-26; Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Henry Zohn (London: Verso, 1983). I am indebted to Susan Buck-Morss's extraordinary achievement in communicating the work of Benjamin: Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1989).

² Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, pp. 80-82; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Ben Fowkes (Penguin/New Left Review, 1976), pp.125-177.

mass leisure, particularly to major exhibitions, trade fairs and department stores, have informed a range of useful scholarship on commodity cultures and their relations to the maintenance of social order, empire and capital. Benjamin conceptualized these leisure environments – not least the centre of Paris itself, remodelled under Baron Haussmann – in terms of dreamscapes, where exploitative labour was obscured by reflective surfaces of gilt and marble:

Urban brilliance and luxury were not new in history, but secular, public access to them was. [...] Paris, a 'looking-glass city', dazzled the crowd but at the same time deceived it. [...] The City of Mirrors – in which the crowd itself became spectacle – reflected the image of people as consumers rather than producers, keeping the class relations of production virtually invisible on the looking glass' other side.³

In Benjamin's unfinished *Arcades Project*, the dated commodity and the dated arcade – outmoded by the development of more sophisticated shopping environments – presented dialectal images, paradigms of the unfulfilled promise of commercial capitalism, the hollow receptacles of collective fantasy. The technologies, aesthetics and commodities of industrial and commercial society thus contained the keys to social awakening. Notably, many of the late-Victorian texts which I examine in the chapters which follow disclose a fixation with the destructive infiltration of working-class environments, of impoverished minds and bodies, with commercial cultures; and in these representations too, the gleaming surface and seemingly healthy consuming body mask social and corporeal horror.

Benjamin's writing on the poet and essayist Charles Baudelaire, closely knitted to his work towards the *Arcades Project*, has had a strong bearing on academic discussion of the modern city, and with figuring modernity in terms of practices of

³ Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, p. 81.

material, visual and sexual consumption.⁴ Baudelaire's writing introduced the symbolic figure of the flâneur, and Benjamin elaborates on this figure, which functions as model of intellectual urban subjectivity. For Benjamin, the flâneur both manifests the commodity, and is reified by the working poet Baudelaire, whose commercial-intellectual productivity involved loitering on the city's streets. Effectively, this loitering is drawn in Benjamin's work as an expression of the masculine privilege of free urban movement, of anonymity within the crowd, and of a gaze which consumes the spectacles of modernity – including its women. Benjamin theorizes the experience of modernity through a number of paradigmatic figures, including those of the flâneur, and of the prostitute - who serves as focus of the activity of the working intellectual in a fast-changing cultural marketplace. She symbolizes the selling of self in capitalism: she is the painted mass article. As David Frisby puts it, the prostitute in these discourses functions as 'a model not only of the reification of the human body within capitalism, but also the cessation of individual identity' through her marketing of herself as a commodity.⁵

The expansion of urban studies over the last four decades has been concerned with the image of the man loitering or walking, and with the inadequacies of this image as paradigm of diverse human experience of modernity – particularly the experience of women.⁶ Perhaps inevitably, feminist responses to masculinist literatures

⁴ C.E. Hill, 'Walter Benjamin's Use of Marxian Texts in 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire'', *Studies in Marxism*, 9 (2003), 49-80; Virginia E. Swain, *Grotesque Figures: Baudelaire, Rousseau, and the Aesthetics of Modernity* (London: John Hopkins, 2004); Françoise Meltzer, *Seeing Double: Baudelaire's Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁵ Frisby, David, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (Cambridge, Polity, 1985), p. 163; I am indebted to Susan Buck-Morss's extraordinary work in communicating the work of Benjamin: Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1989).

⁶ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (London: Allen Lane, 1971); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973); Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1982). See Ana

reproduce many of the same concerns and tropes. A number of academics have addressed the possibility of the presence of a flâneuse, female equivalent to the flâneur, on the streets of the nineteenth-century city. In discussing this issue, scholars of the flâneuse have frequently related their discussions to cities other than Paris, and have worked productively with cultural histories of expanding opportunities for women to undertake paid and voluntary work, and histories of public health.

However, the issue of a female equivalent of the flâneur has tended to centre on women's practices of public or semi-public consumption – whether in terms of shopping and the exercise of a desiring gaze, or in terms of the creation of an urban vision through the structured forms of spectatorship and interpretation central to various forms of charitable and social work. It is in its close attention to the female urban gaze and the objectification, even the pathologizing, of women in public, that this scholarship of the possibility of the flâneuse is so vital to my own work. Janet Wolff's seminal essay 'The Invisible Flâneuse' proved the starting-point for involved academic discussion of women's apparent absence from the discourses of modernity.⁷ Wolff focused on political, literary and sociological accounts of urban experience, and argued that there could be no female equivalent of the flâneur. Texts produced by commentators such as Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and more recently Richard Sennet and Marshall Berman, described only the experience of men, who could move about the city 'observing and being observed, but never interacting with others.'⁸ By contrast, women were the objects of the flâneur's sexualizing gaze and could not participate in the public sphere with a man's freedom.

Parejo Vadillo's extremely useful review of this literature: Ana Parejo Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism: Passengers of Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 9-12.

⁷ Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2:3 (1985), 37-48.

⁸ Ibid, p. 41.

Wolff's essay asserts that although women experienced emerging consumer environments such as the department store, the female shopper could not stand as equivalent to the flâneur. A lady shopper was unable to indulge in aimless city wandering or the kind of brief and anonymous encounters characteristic of flânerie. In this sense, Wolff, in common with many of those debating the possibility of the flâneuse, is immediately concerned with the practices of bourgeois and moneyed women, and with related issues of safety and social respectability. Susan Buck-Morss, working closely with the writings of Baudelaire and Benjamin, has reached similar conclusions to Wolff, asserting that '[T]he flâneur was simply the name of a man who loitered; but all women who loitered risked being seen as whores.'⁹ The woman in public might develop a form of modern urban subjectivity, it is argued, but she remained subject to objectification and curtailment.

Using somewhat different theoretical tools in an important contribution to art history, Griselda Pollock echoed Wolff's argument.¹⁰ Equating the artist and the flâneur, Pollock argued that public space in nineteenth-century Paris was ordered in accordance with a male vision which reduced women, by dint of 'the gaze of modernity which is both covetous and erotic', to sexual objects.¹¹ Critically, Pollock identified the spaces representative of modernity, not as political and administrative spaces, but as leisure sites hosting the intersection of gender and class, the monetary and the sexual: places of pleasurable corporeal experience, for elite males, at least. At such venues, moneyed men could gain access to prostitutes and other working-class

⁹ Susan Buck-Morss, 'The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering' *New German Critique* 39 (1986), 99-140 (p.119).

¹⁰ Pollock, Griselda, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity, and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 50-90.

¹¹ Ibid, p.67.

women; meanwhile, ‘respectable’ women were socially and ideologically excluded from such quintessential sites of modernity. As a discussion of symbolic mapping and everyday social practice, Pollock’s essay, like Woolf’s, acknowledges a quite different experience of the city pertained for women who were respectable and privileged, as opposed to women as consumers and sellers of pleasure – the less respectable women, on whom the work of artists and writers so often focused.

Inevitably, over time, increasingly nuanced understandings of the divisions between public and private ‘spheres’ in the nineteenth century city has emerged through the cumulative work of diverse scholars.¹² Alongside theoretical advances, social historians have explored the participation of elite women in nineteenth-century public life through the avenues of philanthropy, sociology and administration.¹³ The participation of privileged women in these fields raises questions about the modes of spectatorship that were available to them, and reminds us of the very real impact of anxiety around the spread of syphilis on the lives of impoverished women. The nineteenth-century sanitary focus on the control of epidemic and venereal diseases

¹² Some of the key texts being, Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989); Amanda Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History’, *Historical Journal* 36 (1993), 383-414; Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992); Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (London: Yale University Press, 2006); *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Rethinking Separate Spheres*, ed. by Robert Beachy, Béatrice Craig and Alastair Owens (Oxford: Berg, 2006)

¹³ For example: F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980); Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984), pp.76-97; Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1991); Anne Summers, ‘A Home From Home: Women’s Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Fit Work For Women*, ed. by Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp.33-63; Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Joyce Senders Pederson, ‘Victorian Liberal Feminism and the ‘Idea’ of Work’, in *Women and Work Culture: Britain c. 1850-1950*, ed. by Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp.27-47; Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850-1914* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1973); Deborah Epstein Nord, *The Apprenticeship of Beatrice Webb* (London: Macmillan, 1985); K.D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). *Slum Travelers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920*, ed. by Ellen Ross (London: University of California Press, 2007), provides some very useful source texts written by ‘lady explorers’.

ensures that histories of the urban intersect with the history of the prostitute as social actor, as well as figure symbolic of the metropolitan disorder and commodification. It can be argued that social, sanitary and medical expertise developed largely in order to define and counter a perceived depravity among some working-class women in the wake of industrialization – a depravity bound up with images of domestic squalor, maternal neglect, intemperance and animalistic sexuality.¹⁴ As the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs), passed during the mid-and late-1860s demonstrate, for many medical and sanitary practitioners, the female body was understood as potential agent of social and biological destruction – particularly the body of the prostitute, subject to intimate examination and confinement.¹⁵

The evangelism that had partially informed early sociological and sanitary investigations would also inform the feminist challenges to the CDAs, through which women entered the public arena to contest male professional expertise. Hitherto sanctioned to intervene in the realm of working-class morality through philanthropic work, middle- and upper-class women used their classed and gendered identification with domestic virtue to attack the sexual double standard and call for wholesale moral reform and new regimes of sexual regulation. The close readings found in the following thesis attend to texts produced against a background of campaigns for social purity, alarm at reports of sexual exploitation of powerless girls by powerful men and by vice rings, and increasingly repressive intervention in the lives of impoverished women.¹⁶

¹⁴ Frank, Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830*, 2nd edn, (London: Routledge, 2000); Eileen Janes Yeo, *The Contest For Social Science: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); *Sex, Gender and Religion: Josephine Butler Revisited*, ed. by Jenny Daggars and Diana Neal (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006).

¹⁶ Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Emma Liggins, 'Prostitution and Social Purity in the 1880s and 1890s', *Critical*

Meanwhile, developments in working-class, women's, and post-colonial history have attended to everyday urban spatial practice, and the vital role played by women's paid and unpaid labour in community life and the national economy, and its economic and ideological undervaluing. Academic discussion of the shared implication of prostitutes, servants and other working-class women in notions of corporeal and moral taint, the marking of social boundaries and the formation of bourgeois identity has further complicated cultural-historical understandings of complex, fluid cities filled with active women.¹⁷

Investigation of the emergence of the emancipated 'New Woman' – whether as flesh- and-blood social actor emerging during the closing years of the century, as inspirational fictive heroine, or as sensationalized product of a hostile media - have further enriched academic appreciation of historical participation by women in city life.¹⁸ Literatures of the gothic and the decadent have been discussed in the context of the New Woman and other threats to the established social order at the fin de siècle. Literary and graphic representations of grotesque and monstrous females, notably of vampires and medusas, it has been suggested, express fear of the erosion of gender and

Survey 15 (2003), 39-55; Lesley Hall, 'Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Gender and History* 16 (2004), 36-56.

¹⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995); Andrew August, *Poor Women's Lives: Gender, Women and Poverty in Late-Victorian London* (London: Associated University Press, 1999) Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900-1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Jane Purvis, *Hard Lessons: the Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989); Deborah Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jane McDermid, *The Schooling of Working-Class Girls in Victorian Scotland: Gender, Education and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2005); Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: the Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London: University College, London, 1998).

¹⁸ Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Carid* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave/Institute for English Studies, 2000).

social boundaries or hierarchies, and reproduce late-Victorian medical formulations to characterize assertive women as hysterical, as voracious consumers. The gaze of the mobile, emancipated and desiring woman is formulated in texts of anxiety as monstrous, her body as unstable and threatening.¹⁹

Those debating the possibility of a flâneuse have drawn on, and contributed to, this expansion of feminist and urban scholarship. Elizabeth Wilson's essay 'The Invisible Flâneur' proved significant in critiquing women's neglect in past and present discourses of modernity.²⁰ Deploying the work of Mary Poovey, for whom ideology is ever unstable, contested and remade, Wilson critiques Wolff's concept of ideology and Pollock's use of a controlling (male) Lacanian gaze as restrictive and counter-productive.²¹ Wilson's essay challenges the definitions of modernity produced in the work of commentators such as Baudelaire and Benjamin as at once narrow and totalizing, and charges Woolf and Pollock with reproducing this narrowness. In a radical move, far from accepting the flâneur's appropriating scopic powers, Wilson links Benjamin's exploration of the urban labyrinth, voyeurism and commodification with male impotence – with the destructive impact of a changing city on masculinity.²²

Significantly, Wilson's work on women in the city acknowledges the presence of working- and middle- class women on the streets and in the workforce. Building on

¹⁹ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Carol A. Senf, *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University, 1988), pp. 63-72; Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'Dracula and the Doctors: Bad Blood, Menstrual Taboo and the New Woman', in *Bram Stoker: History, Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes and Andrew Smith (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 78-95; Christopher Craft, 'Kiss Me With Those Red Lips': Gender Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in *Speaking of Gender*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1989), pp. 216-242; Sian Macfie, 'They Suck Us Dry: A Study of Late Nineteenth-Century Projections of Vampiric Women' in *Subjectivity and Literature from the Romantics to the Present*, ed. by Philip Shaw and Peter Stockwell (London: Pinter, 1991), pp. 58-67.

²⁰ Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Invisible Flâneur', *New Left Review* 191 (1992), 90-110.

²¹ Poovey, *Uneven Developments*.

²² Wilson, *Invisible*, pp. 108-9.

her research in *Adorned in Dreams*, which investigates women's interactions with early commodity cultures, she suggests that women enjoyed a kind of flânerie through their own will to appropriate: in the space of the department store, 'a woman, too, could become a flâneur.'²³ Wilson suggests elsewhere that women in the city were an 'eruption [...] a symbol of disorder, and a problem', and a number of historians have traced the emergence of discourses of pathology and disorder in relation to women's shopping practices, both as regards the presence of crowds of women in the street, and in the figure of the kleptomaniac – the shopper with a mania for consumption.²⁴ While woman as consumer and woman as prostitute occurred in some narratives as doubled or collapsed categories, a significant strand of scholarship has stressed the emancipatory potential of consumption at the city's leisure zones, and the positive socio-economic discourses which addressed the woman as consumer.²⁵ Surveying this range of scholarship, Elana Crane observes that 'In order to see shopping as part of public life, it is necessary to shed the belief that consumption is at worst an affliction and at the least a triviality; it is equally important not to overstate the liberatory powers shopping might hold for consumers.'²⁶

Nevertheless, derisive social and medical narratives of female consumption are not difficult to find; thus, the association of the female body with danger and with disorder, and the intersection of male sexuality and consuming female gaze in the

²³ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London: Virago, 1985); Wilson, 'Invisible', p.101

²⁴ Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago, 1991)

²⁵ Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985); Erika Rappaport, 'A New Era of Shopping: The Promotion of Women's Pleasure in London's West End, 1909-1914' in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. by Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp.130-155; Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁶ Elana Crane, 'Shopping Sense: Fanny Fern and Jennie June on Consumer Culture in the Nineteenth Century' in *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, ed. by Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson and Jane Shattuc (London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 472-486 (p. 475).

commercial city, are common elements in feminist discussion of a range of urban practices. Judith Walkowitz has interrogated the ways in which narratives of sexual danger were formed and disseminated in late-Victorian London, charting the participation of new social actors from a range of backgrounds – including female philanthropists, orators, match girls and lady shoppers – in the public life of the metropolis.²⁷ Walkowitz is interested in the ways these new urban figures revised dominant ‘imaginative mappings’ of London. However, while lady shoppers might re-imagine themselves as flâneurs, as Walkowitz acknowledges, the prostitute was still central to urban discourses, and women shopping in the West End were subject to harassment. In the phantasmagoric zones of London, commerce and sexuality intersected - much as they had in the Parisian arcades.²⁸

The sexualized corporeality of the urban female and the vision she strives to form: these, then, are central to discussion of women’s experience of modernity. While Walkowitz is confident in asserting that, ‘female charity workers [... reimagined] the cityscape of London, particularly the slums, as a place appropriate for women in public’, Deborah Epstein Nord submits the experience and writing practices of Victorian lady novelists, journalists and social investigators to more protracted scrutiny. Nord’s *Walking the Victorian Streets* asks, ‘Could there have been a female spectator or vision of the urban panorama crafted by a female imagination?’²⁹ In common with those discussing the gaze of the shopper, then, Nord and others delving into issues of female participation in social supervision and investigation in the nineteenth century, are dealing in questions of the gaze, of objectivity and detachment

²⁷ Walkowitz, *City*.

²⁸ Judith R. Walkowitz, ‘Going Public: Shopping, Street Harassment, and Streetwalking in Late-Victorian London’, *Representations* 62 (1998), 1-30.

²⁹ Walkowitz, *City*, p. 57; Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 11.

- privileges assigned by masculinist literatures to the male of the species, and not least to the flâneur. As Nord's work on the early female sociologist Beatrice Webb suggests, Webb took scientific analysis, a mode of inquiry and discourse associated with masculine, intellectual enterprise, as her model, endeavouring in her social investigations to assume a 'professional' or 'objective' stance, 'suppressing her gender and her sense of vulnerability.'³⁰ In so doing, Webb sought to distinguish her work from 'womanly' and subjective modes of spectatorship commonly ascribed to female philanthropists - yet Mica Nava, in an important essay, suggests that the authorization of voyeuristic observation of the poor by female philanthropists produced an entitled and pleasurable 'look' similar to that enjoyed by the male flâneur.³¹ Another intriguing essay contends that, in any case, the lived practice of the flâneur did not match the gendered discourses of a detached and rational flânerie.³²

Rather than attempting to reconstruct directly, and theorize, everyday practice from documentary sources, Nava's discussion of elite male *representations* of female consumerism is important in informing my own methodology: I read sociological texts and slum fictions from the perspective of anxiety around consumption, and identify a common shadowing of the commodity by images of bodily horror. For Nava's work reminds us of the psychic-material investment in corporal-social boundaries which was at stake in elite denigration of feminine consumption. While discourses of modernity are 'marked by adherence to the immutability of [class, gender and racial] boundaries,'

³⁰ Walkowitz, *City*, p. 57; Nord, *Walking*, pp. 184-191; see also Nord, *The Apprenticeship*.

³¹ Mica Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City, and the Department Store' in *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of Modernity*, ed. by Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 38-76 (p.43); see also Cathleen J. Hamann, 'Ladies on the Tramp: The Philanthropic Flâneuse and Appropriations of Victorian London's Impoverished Domesticity' in *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Space*, ed. by Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 65-86.

³² Ruth E. Iskin, 'The Flâneuse in French Fin-de-Siècle Posters: Advertising Images of Modern Women in Paris', in *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth Century Paris*, ed. by Aruna D'Souza and Tom MacDonough, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 113-128 (pp. 123-4).

in the phantasmagoric city there was a ‘growing stress upon surface impressions and the instability of boundaries.’³³ Crucially for the modelling of my own thesis, Nava traces connections between mass cultures conceived as polluting, a despised femininity, and fear of cultural-physical engulfment in representations produced by male writers of the urban, and in continental crowd theories, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. In a range of urban texts produced during this period, the crowd was imagined, as McClintock puts it, as ‘metonymic symbol of the unemployed and unruly poor’, of prostitution, and as ‘paradigm of unnatural agency – violently irrational, yet hypnotically ductile, savage and bestial, inherently criminal and, above all, female.’³⁴ Thus, suggests Nava, dominant literatures of modernity, in obsessively denigrating women’s activities in modernity through images of ‘inferior’ and regressive corporeality, indicate anxiety and denial.

I have also found the work of Rita Felski most stimulating. Felski she explores how our understanding of modernity would change if, instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, were we to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women. Though she concurs with Susan Buck-Morss that a flâneuse was impossible, Felski suggests that female consumers may have developed a modified ‘voyeuristic’ gaze in relation to commodities, and acknowledges that the department store was a new kind of urban space in which women formed fresh subjectivities. Thus, suggesting that ‘The feminization of modernity [as mass culture and democracy [...]] is largely synonymous with its demonisation’, Felski broadens and enriches our understanding of masculinist responses to women’s participation in modernity.³⁵

³³ Nava, pp. 42-47.

³⁴ McClintock, p. 119. I discuss crowd theory in chapter two of this thesis.

³⁵ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.62.

Felski's discussion of Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* (*The Ladies Paradise*) (1883) focuses on the text's representation of women both as commodities, and as objects of consumption – as both passively susceptible to the lure of phantasmagoria, and as frighteningly voracious. In so doing, she, like Nava, draws on the feminized mob of nineteenth-century social theory, locating the novel's representations of female consumption within broad anxieties around social unrest. In Zola's depiction of the department store, she argues, class differences between female consumers are minimized and gender differences accentuated. Similarly, in Zola's representation of the eponymous prostitute in *Nana* (1880), the mixing of seminal fluids inside the actress-prostitute figures the female body as disorderly threat to class differentiation. Felski presents a key transcoding of the body of the consuming and consumable female in these archetypal texts of modernity, writing that, 'In Zola's novels, anxieties about the female body and the modern city merge indistinguishably'.³⁶

It is no disrespect to suggest that whether or not Nava or Felski agree on the possibility of a flâneuse – and even what a flâneuse might be – is, for me, among the least interesting aspects of their very exciting and suggestive work. Discussions by Sally Ledger and Lise Shapiro Sanders of 'the shop girl' likewise disagree over designation of the status of flâneuse.³⁷ Yet Ledger and Sanders present rich, and largely compatible, critical-historical treatments of the shopgirl as historical and symbolic figure.

³⁶ Ibid, p.75.

³⁷ Ledger, Sally, 'Gissing, the Shopgirl, and the New Woman', *Women: A Cultural Review* 6 (1995), 263-74; Lise Shapiro Sanders, *Consuming Fantasies: Labor, Leisure, and the London Shopgirl, 1880-1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p.216.

As one important critic notes in a discussion of the work of Wolff, Pollock and other scholars of the flâneuse, the historical figure of the flâneur has become entangled, in some cases, with the flâneur's symbolic function as model of urban subjectivity, so that the term 'flâneur' 'risks an overload of significance which results in meaninglessness... [the term] is currently at once too vague and too exclusive.'³⁸ The importance of the work of some of the critics I have reviewed here, I suggest, lies not in their conclusions on the applicability of the term flâneuse to the lady shopper or philanthropist, but in their analysis of a determined association by some elite commentators, of nascent commodity cultures with bodily contamination and social disorder. It is these insights which I take into the chapters that follow.

CONSUMING VICE: THE BODY OF THE CITY

In two articles, published in 1885 and 1889 respectively, Theresa Shrewsbury and Maude Stanley – both deeply involved in efforts by elite women to provide clubs for impoverished young females in the late-Victorian city - offer similar narratives.³⁹ In these narratives, impoverished young women are framed as being endangered by a set of intersecting desires – for men, for urban spectacle, for commodities, for socialism.⁴⁰ The arousal and satisfaction of such desire threatens social cataclysm. For Stanley, encouraging the formation of clubs for working women was no mere hobby: mobilizing impassioned social purity rhetoric in the service of conservatism, her article

³⁸ Deborah, Parsons, *Steetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.5.

³⁹ Theresa Shrewsbury, 'Prevention' *Nineteenth Century* 18 (1885), 957-964; Maude Stanley, 'Clubs for Working Girls', *Nineteenth Century* 25 (1889), 73-83.

⁴⁰ For a sense of these club movements, see also Maude Stanley, *Clubs for Working Girls* (London: Macmillan, 1904); Patricia Mary Clyne, *The Girls' Friendly Society 1875-1900* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2003); Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community Life for Single Women 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985), pp. 232-34.

outlines the hazard inherent in a ‘fling’, ‘a saucy word’ and ‘swearing’ when city girls walked the streets by gaslight, ‘weakened in mind and in body, too often by the vices and degradations of their parents’. She calls for action to counter the menace of ‘many a murmur [...] against the hardship of this unequal world.’ Her elite readership must provide an endangered - and dangerous - female workforce with moral guidance, tea, buns and music drill in order to ‘stem the tide of evil.’⁴¹ Shrewsbury too speaks of the vice which may ‘engulf’ the nation, and traces the existence of urban ‘plague spots’ to the lack of direct contact between the poorest, and those possessed of ‘refinement’.⁴²

Both Shrewsbury’s and Stanley’s productions bring into rapid association disquiet around social dissolution, deleterious practices of leisure and consumption, and urban sexuality, and map onto the city a sense of crisis. The impoverished female produced by the city is represented as an unstable and transgressive form, ever threatened by and threatening adulteration – a body in need of control. Disease may be the outcome of male vice, but the focus of action is the sexualized female body and the maintenance of feminine desire.

What is central to these texts, along with the notion of a mobile and consuming femininity, is the conception of working-class leisure practices in terms of a breaking down of social and sexual limits, a swamping of body and nation by a ‘tide’ of ‘plague’, of ‘vice, disease, crime’. It is no coincidence that Shrewsbury and Stanley represent clubs for working girls and the lodges of the Girl’s Friendly Society as safe interiors preventing fall and thus disease: protective barriers – one might say, social prophylactics. As the discussion in the previous section indicated, representations of the consuming and commodified woman in terms of pathology and disease, and of the

⁴¹ Stanley, pp. 75-77.

⁴² Shrewsbury, pp. 959-60.

city in terms of alluring commodity cultures visible to all who traversed its streets, were commonplaces of late-Victorian social and medical discourses.

My thesis turns upon the idea that the rich insights produced by scholarship of the flâneuse, of anxiety around elite women's practices of consumption, and of representations of female monstrosity in fin-de-siècle texts of the gothic and decadent – texts characterized by images of corporeal-cultural engulfment - may be of use in examining late-Victorian representations of impoverished, transgressive or degraded femininities. Just as Rita Felski and Mica Nava ask how our understanding of modernity would change were we to emphasize texts about women, and representations of consumption and phantasmagoria, I ask the same question in relation to texts of documentary describing impoverished women, and to slum fiction. This is the essential premise of the following chapters. I examine depictions of very poor women in relation to commodity cultures and consumerism, and in doing so I locate images of taint, pathology and monstrosity.

As I demonstrate in the chapters that follow, representations of impoverished femininity in its interactions with the commodity and commercial aesthetics written during the 1890s, presented increasingly explicit images of bodily regression and horror. In the course of this thesis, then, I excavate not only disquieting representations of a desiring female gaze, but complex dialectics between dazzling surface and horrifying depths, between modernity and regression, between the female body and the social. In the slum novel of the 1890s, images of corporeal and cultural penetration are framed in terms of infection and regression. Indeed, in these texts, phantasmagoria works like syphilis.

Pollock's famous essay locates the lower-class female as consumable in the liminal leisure spaces of the city; the work of Wilson notes the habitual presence of working-class women in the city's streets. Gill Davies presents the grotesquely consuming body of the impoverished women found in fin-de-siècle slum fictions in terms of a different kind of 'New Woman.'⁴³ Friedberg emphasizes the increasing availability of commodified experiences at major exhibition sites which, she claims, turned 'the pleasures of flânerie into a commodity form.'⁴⁴ Gillian Swanson suggests that the nineteenth century saw reciprocation between 'the meaning of prostitution, embodying working-class female urban femininity', and that of bourgeois female consumer, both being identified with disorder and morbidity.⁴⁵ Indeed, Felski's double focus on Zola's shoppers and Zola's whore, referred to previously in this Introduction, plots perfectly the common associations between phantasmagoric cultures, the consumer, the prostitute, disease, and the social body: 'In Zola's novels, anxieties about the female body and the modern city merge indistinguishably, as twin zones of social instability which engender the risk of contamination, corruption and subversion of the law by the tyranny of desire.'⁴⁶

That longstanding analogies between social organization and the human body were revamped during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through the development of state apparatus, and of biologically-informed social science, has been well-rehearsed by social and cultural historians. These configurations held a particular relevance to working-class sexuality and the impoverished female body: over the course of the nineteenth century, sanitary experts drew of a series of parallels between

⁴³ Davies, 'Foreign Bodies: Images of the London Working Class at the End of the Nineteenth Century', *Literature and History* 14 (1988), 64-80.

⁴⁴ Friedberg, p. 51

⁴⁵ Gillian Swanson, 'Drunk With the Glitter: Consuming Spaces and Sexual Geographies' in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. by Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 80-99 (p. 82).

⁴⁶ Felski, p. 75.

the social body and the body of the prostitute, held to function both as necessary urban 'sewer' and as deadly pollutant. Emerging specialisms, concerned with the prevention of epidemic and infectious diseases, found expression in medical cartography and anatomically-organized images of circulation and disease: of murky, insanitary urban orifices needful of statistical and scientific attention. The spread of venereal disease was framed, like an epidemic disease, as a threat to social health - not least, through its crossing of corporeal and class boundaries via the infected body of the prostitute, conduit of working-class filth.⁴⁷

The figure of woman as consumer and as commodity, as centre of disruption, and as canker in the social order; rich metonymic chains linking of urban artificiality to moral taint and organic infection: these are eminently detectable in fictions and documentary texts addressing issues of consumption of mass cultures by impoverished women at the fin de siècle. Yet in spite of the availability of a wealth of interlocking cultural histories and theoretical tools to assist in analysis of these tropes and connections, a concentrated exploration of impoverished women's encounters with commodity culture has not been attempted in this way before.

In order to draw out the phantasmagoric poison, as it were, from these texts, I move across fields of cultural and social history, working with care to build up a sense of significant affiliations between consumer and prostitute, body and slum, commodity and death's head, veil and decapitator. Just as Nava and Felksi ask how our understanding of modernity would change were we to emphasise texts about women, and representations of consumption and phantasmagoria, I ask how our understanding

⁴⁷ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986); Mary Poovey, *Making A Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp.74-93; Yeo, *Contest For Social Science*; Pamela K. Gilbert, *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

of modernity and of representations of impoverished women would change, if we approached narratives describing impoverished women from a similar perspective. My thesis argues that phantasmagoria in these texts is represented as contaminating, and that it produces bodily horror. Building a sense of the ways in which the notion of ‘love of finery’ was reframed in the context of developing commodity cultures, I contest that in some fin-de-siècle slum writing, the interactions between the female body and the display window are represented in terms not only of seduction and taint, but of bodily infection.

This thesis has a two-part structure. Part One explores texts of fiction, journalism and sociology which were produced during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and which are concerned with a range of missionary and reforming responses to questions of metropolitan poverty and female labour. Approaching these texts through the lens of consumption, this section begins to trace common cultural associations linking female bodies, the commodity, and urban horror. In order to identify representations of mass culture as site of communicable toxicity, I work with established scholarship of the love of finery, perceptions of working-class sexuality, and the prostitute as quintessential urban figure.

Chapter One offers a close reading of Walter Besant’s 1882 novel *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*. A popular journalist and novelist with a keen interest in philanthropic projects, Besant’s story of an heiress who offers the gifts of improved working conditions and elite culture to the East End needlewomen she employs, informed a range of positive narratives of urban amelioration in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Consideration of the novel’s focus on the working-class female

body as site of reform and class reconciliation allows for the initial unpacking of a number of themes and tropes important to my thesis.

Attending to the needlewoman as figure embodying anxieties around social atomization and the intersection of commerce, femininity, and epidemic disease, my close reading does more than focus on the novel's vision of social healing through supervision of a symptomatic urban body. By exploring the gothic legacy of both prostitute and needlewoman as paradigms of urban femininity, and highlighting the novel's concern with the reform of needlewomen's appetites, mobility and habits of consumption, I detect a dark and disorderly figure haunting the text – that of a 'loudly'-dressed, sexualized and porous grotesque. Angela Messenger's missionary aesthetic of social purity must heal and seal this disorderly figure through the stimulation of desire for refined pleasures.

My reading pinpoints interactive imagery of bodily decay - particularly of the death's head - and of dazzling aesthetic surface and foul depths at work in the novel. I highlight the presence of tropes of infection, not only in relation to the sexualized female body, but in Besant's representation of the functioning of positive womanly influence. I underscore the motif of the contaminating touch of working-class masculinity, which is depicted as working in conjunction with exposure to the city's destructive subcultures. Associations between the female labourer, the prostitute and the death's head, and tropes of aesthetic-sexual seduction, are revisited and probed further as the thesis develops.

In Chapter Two, I analyse texts of journalism produced by Annie Besant, Walter Besant's estranged sister-in-law, during the famous match women's strike in

the East End of London during the summer of 1888. Whereas Walter's romance is haunted by the needlewoman's gothic double, Annie Besant's reportage makes explicit the same themes of prostitution and disease around the city's impoverished working women. Alerting her readers to the moral and biological dangers of starvation wages and insanitary conditions at Bryant and May's factory at Bow, she works to demystify the enjoyments of the rich as indulgences paid for by class exploitation. In locating elite aesthetic indulgence within the social through disclosure of the trauma endured by the match women in producing profit as dividends, Annie Besant transcodes the endangered and diseased body of the matchwoman and the prostitute, with the slum and the veiled horrors of industrialism.

My reading of Annie Besant's texts of accusation teases out further the common narrative paradigms through which urban dazzle is re-inscribed with death – and is made darkly contagious in the mass-produced commodity. Addressing both Annie's contrasting of elite aesthetic and nutritional consumption with the poisons ingested by match women, and her account of an attack by the match women on a statue of Gladstone, I develop longstanding associations between aesthetic and toxic consumption, sexual defilement, a rotting or regressive physiognomy, the (veiled) skull, and social disorder in discourses of urban modernity. I show how in Annie Besant's writing, social outrage is yoked to fear of an exploited female body: in a context of cultural affiliations between the veiled commodity, the veiled woman and the castrator, and narratives of female revolutionary violence, Besant's journalism produces a match woman who is endangered, but who is also destructive and grotesque.

Chapter three explores gendered discourses of bodily danger around 'dangerous trades' in the 1890s. The discussion spotlights the reassuring accounts of the working practices of Bryant and May, produced by shareholders and laissez-faire feminists such as Mrs Fawcett, which repudiated sensational press revelations of hidden cases of phossy jaw. My main focus, however, is piece written by the journalist Lloyd Lester for *The Girl's Own Paper*. In Lester's article, the ameliorative romance of Walter Besant meets the emerging dreamspace of commercial exhibition, as the clean contours of 'reformed' matchwomen are read off as embodiments of social improvement. Informed by commercial-exhibitionary logic, Lester's article rejects charges of industrialism's production of leaky body of toxic consumption, disease and physiognomic horror, as described by Annie Besant and the *Star*. Instead, Lester describes the match women as models of a canonical, pre-industrial maidenhood, achieved through sustained contact with industrial technologies.

As the second part of the thesis illustrates, during the 1890s, a series of pessimistic slum fictions elaborated tropes of feminine cultural and bodily ingestion, disease and horror, within an increasingly visible and accessible commercial culture. Lester's text, however, celebrates the biological and social impact of commercial technologies to produce a social-political phantasmagoria. In Lester's account, itself contributing to an expanding youth media, scientific achievement merges with enchantment, and the match woman's once-fearful bodies are rendered passive surfaces for the projection of desire and myth.

In Chapter Four, I approach the female body's perceived instability and liability to ingestion of urban poisons from a different perspective. Delving into the important sociological documents held at the Booth Collection at the London School

of Economics, this chapter examines the so-called ‘thumbnail character sketch’ written by investigators in 1897 for Booth’s *Life and Labour* survey. The ‘sketch’ represents the impressions jotted down by the investigator when interviewing providers of moral guidance and forms of charity in the capital; these short, potent texts often include physiognomic descriptions as guide to character.

My discussion of the ‘sketch’ highlights the surfacing of those familiar metonymic connections between urban taint, female corporeality, and the erosion of social boundaries, during the investigators’ encounters with Jean Price, an experienced philanthropic worker running a club for female factory labourers on the Isle of Dogs. When Miss Price is ‘caught’ by a social investigator immediately after staining a floor, I examine her countering of apparent suspicions of her own integrity. Her strategy, oddly enough, involves projecting images of inappropriate mobility and unwholesome cultural ingestion onto a philanthropic neighbour.

Part Two of the thesis focuses on fictional depictions of the slum as landscape of consumption and contamination, written between 1889 and 1897. In their different ways, the fictions analysed here represent the expanding mass market of the 1890s in terms of dazzle masking death, seduction producing disease: the commodity is figured as the veil of ruin. In these narratives the combined enticements presented by inorganic goods, modern cultural technologies and the male touch – whether sexual or violent – produce organic and moral decay.

Deploying the insights of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, Chapter Five presents an intensive reading of socialist-feminist Margaret Harkness’s 1887 novel *A City Girl* which reveals the text’s wealth of sophisticated dialectical imagery:-

Harkness depicts East and South London as capitalist dreamscapes, alluring, mystifying as to social relations, and destructively present within otherwise harsh material environments. In *A City Girl*, the phantasmagoric spaces of London – including the now largely-forgotten Albert Palace at Battersea Park – stand as dangerous and transformative zones in which moneyed men gain access to working-class women. Ultimately, this world of fetishes is made for the privileged male gaze. Yet, though Harkness's narrative binds the reception of mass culture to sexual-social exploitation, even to death, I argue that it mounts a remarkable Marxist critique of commercial urban cultures which resists pessimism. While the privileged male does indeed practice an approximation of flânerie, exercising a gaze at once 'covetous and erotic', he is also revealed as hollow - as a figure in crisis.⁴⁸ For Harkness's impoverished heroine, meanwhile, commercial aesthetics and technologies present opportunities for revelation, if not for revolution: the narrative offers a scene in which 'true' socio-economic relations are revealed, and their revelation is bound up with an anonymous and desiring female gaze - and with a scene viewed through a domestic window which suggest the projections, displays and illusions of theatre, shrine, arcade, and shop.

The female gaze intently taking in the contents of a window: this freighted urban image is repeated several times in the course of George Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889), to which I turn in chapter six. Continuing to unpack deep-rooted cultural affiliations between the commodity, urban taint and corporeal horror, my discussion identifies a dynamic by which female consumers are rendered pathological and vampiric through exposure to commercial aesthetics, and the bodily desires which such exposure brings. In Gissing's novel, the display windows of humble shops in

⁴⁸ Pollock, p. 67.

Clerkenwell and Islington are rendered conduits of seduction, contamination and death. As with *A City Girl*, a harsh material environment is punctuated by alluring commercial displays. In fact these displays are conceived of as so alluring, so powerful, that female bodies are represented degenerating in the gleaming bar room, pathologized at the pudding-shop window, diseased by a fallenness which is bound up with commercial desire. Indeed, slum females are rendered positively gothic through their access to bright and toxic city pleasures; their gaze is imagined to be every bit as 'covetous and erotic' if not *always* as 'controlling', as that of the male flâneur in the literatures of modernity.⁴⁹

Continuing to challenge any simplistic readings of degeneration as a narrow matter of inherited organic identity, I focus in the two final, closely-related chapters of this thesis, on four slum fictions written within a nine-year period (Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889), Rudyard Kipling's 'The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot' (1890), Arthur Morrison's 'Lizerunt' (1894) and W Somerset Maugham's *Liza of Lambeth* (1897)). My investigation highlights these narratives' presentation of the popular leisure zone and the slum as extensive dialectical networks of destructive feminine consumption and morbid bodily connection. The female body's exposure to the city's merged sexual and aesthetic attractions is expressed through images of disease and reversion, detectable with reference to influential fin-de-siècle frameworks such as zoological biogenetic law. In exploring these themes, particularly in chapter seven, I draw upon Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque social body, and on Foucault's concept of the heterotopia.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 67.

Coding both close organic and synthetic contact as degenerative, these narratives, I suggest, position impoverished women in layers of time. Specifically, the texts deal in the carnivalesque time of the Bank Holiday, and the youthful ingestion of commercial cultures; in the time of the ageing individual body; and in evolutionary time. The female body, and the body of the slum baby/abortion, are figured in terms of recapitulation. And again, the dynamics of phantasmagoric exposure merge with those of disease, of syphilis. I show how elaborate paradigms of exposure to the city's phantasmagoria and to the touch of the impoverished male are linked in these fictions with the onset of corruption and descent into grotesque shapelessness and diseased fecundity.

In the Conclusion to my thesis, I reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of my work in terms of structure, critical lens and historicization. I discuss some of the ways in which I might develop the insights gained in the course of writing my thesis, tackling future projects with greater confidence. Most importantly, I consider how intensive work with past and contemporary discourses addressing issues of body, appetite and autonomy, might guide me towards richer and more effective readings of texts produced at the *fin de siècle* and beyond.

Chapter One

FINDING THE FINERY:

WALTER BESANT'S *ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN*

Walter Besant, biographer, critic, popular historian, commercially-successful condition-of-England novelist, asserted the dignity of writing as a profession, campaigned for copyright law reform and is remembered by critics primarily for a theoretical dispute with Henry James regarding the appropriate scope and subject-matter of fiction.¹ The solidly middle-class son of a wine merchant, Besant exerted himself as tirelessly for good causes such as free public libraries as he did for the Society of Authors, in whose founding he was a key player.² His perceived expertise on 'outcast' London is evidenced by his role as inaugural speaker at the opening of Mansfield House New Residence at Barking Road in 1897. The content of Besant's address chimed nicely with the cultural aspirations of an Anglican settlement whose residents aimed to 'sweeten and refine the inward life' of their 'poorer neighbours', not so much by doles of money as by supervised doles of elite culture.³ Notwithstanding a rapidly-changing sociological and political environment, Besant offered his audience a vision of benevolent personal guidance, extended to the working classes by the educated elite, as social cure. In the face of the socialist challenge, Besant rejected not only the giving of indiscriminate charity, but any encouragement to the poor to involve

¹ Walter Besant, *The Art of Fiction: A Lecture With Notes and Additions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1884); Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction' (1884, 1888) in *The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and Practice of Fiction*, ed. by William Veeder and Susan M. Griffin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 165-196; John Goode 'The Art of Fiction: Walter Besant and Henry James', in *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Critical Essays on Some English and American Novels*, ed. by David Howard, John Lucas and John Goode (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp.243-281.

² Simon Eliot, 'Besant, Sir Walter (1836-1901)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 60 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), v, 507-509.

³ Hugh B. Philpott, 'A Centre of Light in Canning Town' *Quiver*, 137 (1905), 1156-1163 (p.1157).

themselves in radical politics: ‘The note of the new philanthropy is personal service; not money; not a cheque; not a subscription written; not speeches on a platform; not tracts.’⁴ For him, Mansfield House and the Settlement movement as a whole were supposed to curb that sort of thing.

Besant looks back and shudders at a lawless eighteenth-century metropolis in which the poor were left to their own rotten devices. Significantly, the Regency city which he describes is largely defined by ongoing robbery of the rich. And to this motif of robbery he yokes another – that of the city’s production of unwashed, unsexed women, whose bodies materialize urban chaos as diseased and disorderly gender:

Nobody was any the better for the money gained by robbery, but only so much the worse. Their personal habits were to the last degree disgusting. The women wore a gown of some thick stuff which they never changed; they wore no hat or bonnet, but in cold weather a kerchief over the head and tied under the chin; they never combed their hair [...] they fought with fists, like the men, in a ring; they drank like the men; they cursed and swore like the men; and like the men they all died young by the diseases belonging to their way of life.⁵

In this delineation of a dangerous sexual culture, Besant does not specify those ‘diseases belonging to their way of life’. But this passage alerts us that, as the equations of poverty with impurity, disease, and ‘savagery’, were reconceived within changing social and scientific contexts, the assumed threat from a deviant and diseased femininity continued to disturb and fascinate observers. For Parliamentary commissioner Jelinger Symons in the 1840s, for Besant, and for the quasi-naturalist slum writers of the 1890s, it is female sexuality which stands at the centre of the urban problem; the condition of England is intimately connected with the condition of the

⁴ Walter Besant ‘Our New Settlements (Inaugural Address at the opening of Mansfield House New Residence, 5 December 1897)’ in *University and Social Settlements*, ed. by W. Reason (London: Methuen & Co., 1898), pp.1-10 (p. 4).

⁵ Besant, ‘Our New Settlements’, pp. 8-9.

impoverished urban female.⁶ What Frank Mort writes of early nineteenth-century social and sanitary reformers was true throughout the nineteenth century: 'Working-class women were both eroticized and condemned as immoral pollutants, the cause of decline of whole communities, and heralded as the agents of moral reform.'⁷ Indeed, Mort could be referring to the content of Besant's 1882 novel *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*.

Stimulating criticism has done much to disclose the exclusions and contradictions at the heart of *All Sorts*, and of the wider philanthropic project of which it formed a part.⁸ The function of its heroine, Angela Messenger, as vector of culture and virtue, has been explored. Less critical attention has been paid to the complementary part played by the novel's working-class female as potential conduits of urban blight. Nor has the novel been examined in the wake of recent scholarship redefining aestheticism through ground-breaking archival research and sustained analysis of fin-de-siècle integrations of the aesthetic, the philanthropic, and the political.

Exciting new readings of the disparate tendencies within British aestheticism have developed our appreciation of the diversity of the late-Victorian scene and our understanding of the complex relations between decadence – the alienated aesthetics of private consumption - and socially-engaged, and socialist, aestheticisms. We now have

⁶ For discussion of the erotically-charged report written by Symonds regarding women mine-workers for the 1842 Employment Commission, see Jane Humphries, 'Protective Legislation, the Capitalist State and Working-Class Men: the Case of the 1842 Mines Regulation Act', *Feminist Review* 7 (1981), 1-34.

⁷ Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830* (London: Routledge, 1987), p.47.

⁸ Wim Neetens, 'Problems of a 'Democratic Text': Walter Besant's Impossible Story in *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882)', in *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminist Readings of Underrated Victorian Fiction* ed. by Leah Harman (New York: Garland, 1996), pp.135-158; Simon Joyce *Capital Offenses: Geographies of Class and Crime in Victorian London* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), pp. 190-227; Matthew K. McKean, 'Rethinking Late-Victorian Slum Fiction: The Crowd and Imperialism at Home English', *Literature in Transition*, 54 (2011), 28-55.

a more immediate sense of the ways in which philanthropic and Socialist aesthetics were forged by the fear of social dissolution - or a joyful belief in imminent revolution.⁹ In this critical context, *All Sorts* may be read as a revealing elaboration of what Diana Maltz has called ‘missionary aestheticism’ – a belief in ‘the fantasy of remedying slum chaos and slum brutality through communal aesthetic revelation.’¹⁰

In this, missionary aesthetes were influenced by thinkers such as John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, who saw in the dissemination of taste and intellectual development the means of meeting the challenges of industrialization and its attendant privations.¹¹ As Maltz argues, activists such as moralizing housing manager Octavia Hill and those involved in the University Settlement movement, such as Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, were as inspired by Ruskin’s ethical aesthetics as by influential Oxford academic T.H. Green’s philosophy of service, or by Christian Socialism.¹² The same can be said of the philanthropic – aesthetic – practices idealized in Besant’s novel, which outlines a paternalist project, and calls it social revolution. Rather than a utopian vision stimulating desire for a new social and economic system, Besant’s

⁹ Important instances of this work include: Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts, c.1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); *Art for the People: Culture in the Slums of Late-Victorian Britain* by Giles Waterfield (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1994); Regenia Gagnier, ‘A Critique of Practical Aesthetics’, in *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. by George Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), pp.264-282; Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Diana Maltz, *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870-1900: Beauty for the People* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Morna O’Neill, *Walter Crane: The Arts and Crafts, Painting and Politics 1875-1890* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Maltz *British Aestheticism*, p.1.

¹¹ John Ruskin, *Unto This Last: and Other Writings by John Ruskin* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985); John Ruskin, *The Social and Economic Works of John Ruskin* (London: Routledge, Thoemmes, 1994); John D. Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass: A Portrait of Ruskin’s Genius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter Logan, *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* (Albany: Stanford University Press, 2009); Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹² Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and His Age* (London: University Press of America, 1983); Gillian Darley, *Octavia Hill: A Life* (London: Constable, 1990); John Nelson Tarn, *Five Per Cent Philanthropy: An Account of Housing in Urban Areas, 1840-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972).

narrative presents a fantasy of feudalism – of an aesthetics which is communal, but which is primarily concerned with the embourgeoisment of working-class taste.

This chapter examines Walter Besant's presentation of a missionary aesthetics of social purity, and its manifestation of a set of very specific sexual-corporeal concerns. The aesthetic project detailed in the novel's pages counters negative transmissions of commodity culture linked to disease, bodily horror and social breakdown. To identify these concerns in this apparently positive vision, the following discussion moves freely across cultural histories – of consumption, of philanthropy, of the geographical, of the sanitary, of needlewoman and prostitute as twinned prototypes of urban femininity. Approaching the novel through these prisms, this chapter does more than explore how the aesthetic reformation of a group of needlewomen discloses anxiety around women's participation in city life and their supposed seduction by the spectacles of modernity. It lays the foundations for my development of readings of female interaction with finery, commercial aesthetics and the grotesque sexualized body to reveal a commonly-occurring cultural paradigm: that of phantasmagoric infection.

NOT DOLES, BUT TASTE:

THE GIFT OF AESTHETICS AS SOCIAL CURE

All Sorts and Conditions of Men proved to be Besant's most influential and commercially successful work of fiction. The novel tells the story of two privileged young people, Angela Messenger and Harry Goslett, who undertake an ambitious mission of practical aestheticism in the East End of London. Angela is a wealthy heiress whose grandfather founded the family fortune through his brewery in Stepney;

Harry is the orphaned son of a humble soldier from Stepney who was adopted in his infancy by Lord Jocelyn Le Breton. Angela describes herself as being potentially ‘one of the people’ and Whitechapel as her ‘proper sphere’ (6- 7); Harry speaks of the people of the East End as ‘my own people’ (11). Determined to intervene positively in the lives of the East-End working classes, they lodge at Stepney Green, assuming the identities, respectively, of a seamstress called Miss Kennedy, and of Harry Goslett, carpenter; thus disguised, they fall in love with one another. Angela busies herself setting up a form of co-operative company employing hitherto impoverished dressmakers. Much is made of Angela’s attack upon the laws of political economy: disguised as Miss Kennedy, she tells her employees that her co-operative is being part-funded for a limited period by Angela Messenger, who has placed a substantial order with the shop (80-81). As one critic points out, this evasion of the supply-and-demand mechanism forms part of Besant’s banishment of commercial interests from Stepney Green, allowing for ‘a genuine confrontation of opposed interests to be avoided’: Angela is simultaneously employer, co-worker, patron and friend.¹³ She provides exercise in the shape of tennis and dancing, and lavishes upon her employees – quite literally – tea and sympathy. She and Harry dream of a grand recreational and artistic centre, a spiritually-improving Palace of Delight, run by and for the people of the East End.

Meanwhile, Harry takes control, through powerful oratory, of the local political scene – that is, of the Advanced Club, a radical talking-shop whose members are characterized as being ill-informed and irrational. Harry’s preaching, accompanied by a soupcon of corporal punishment, provides the detailed political vision underlying the cultural vision of the People’s Palace. As is made clear both through the intimate

¹³ Neetens, pp. 251-253.

individual work undertaken by Angela and the public pronouncements of her husband-to-be, social reform is to be detached from class politics and reframed as an expression of the shared best interests of 'rich' and 'poor'.¹⁴ The novel concludes with the marriage of Harry and Angela, coinciding with the opening of the People's Palace, which has been built secretly at Angela's direction. The text closes with a speech by Harry outlining the Palace's role as apolitical site of class reconciliation.

In a letter to her friend Constance Woodcote, Angela interprets the urban problems which she has encountered, and describes her solution to them. Her aim is to breed 'discontent' among the working classes, but this proves a rather different notion of 'discontent' to that advanced by socialist in the 1880s and 1890s. Socialist aesthetes during this period debated the ways in which elevated desires might be developed in proletarians coarsened by exploitation and by resort to commercial entertainments. Aesthetic revelation through art and reorganized leisure, it was believed, would engender class consciousness, stimulating revolutionary desire.¹⁵ The narrative of *All Sorts* similarly interprets working-class sensibilities as blunted and corrupted by the lures of the modern city. However, Besant's heroine seeks to breed discontent among the poor, not with the broader economic and social system, but with their own inadequacies.

Rather than developing class consciousness, shared enjoyments are to produce a community of discriminating individuals reconciled to slow, permissive reforms of the existing order. This is the gift, not of indiscriminate doles, but of aesthetic-moral transformation. As Angela informs Constance, '[T]hey do not want to copy our ways [...] they will naturally take as much money as we choose to give them [...] they

¹⁴ Neetens, p.253; Joyce, pp.196-7.

¹⁵ Waters, pp. 43-64.

consider the exhortations, teachings, preachings [...] as uncomfortable but unavoidable accompaniments of this gift' (103). Angela explains that she is, by close personal example, showing her employees 'better things' (103). The scheme, involving local interference with the principles of laissez-faire, is communal but counters socialism - not only the violence and redistributive logic of revolution, but any thought of legislative state action. The novel fantasizes the creation of harmonious social relations through the gift 'all the things which make the lives of the rich happy' (330). Material improvement through a network of voluntary co-operative schemes is scheduled to make ongoing refinement possible for an ever-expanding proportion of the population.

This aesthetic cure emphasizes the common connection of social instability to the disordered feminine, and it does so, as Ian Haywood points out, through a reworking of the figure of the distressed needlewoman – a figure also resuscitated by socialist-feminist Margaret Harkness in her novel *A City Girl*.¹⁶ The seamstress, so often depicted in terms of a passive, seemingly pre-industrial maidenhood thrown to the wolf of laissez-faire economics, had presented for many mid-century novelists a form of sweated femininity more attractive – at least, less threateningly independent - than the factory girl.¹⁷ But an image of genteel, or at least womanly, poverty, is not the whole story.

¹⁶ Ian Haywood, 'The Retailoring of Dickens: *Christmas Shadows*, Radicalism, and the Needlewoman Myth', in *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Beth Harris (Aldershot: Ashgate 2005), pp. 67-86 (p.83).

¹⁷ Lynn M. Alexander, 'Creating a Symbol: the Seamstress in Victorian Literature', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 18 (1999), 29-38.

**‘THAT PHANTOM OF GRISLY BONE’:
TRACING THE NEEDLEWOMAN’S GOTHIC LEGACY**

The fantasy of the closure of social-geographical gulf through the aesthetic gift is played out across the intimate space of the poverty-stricken female’s body: this is the site at which Piccadilly and the East End are stitched together. The novel tells its readers that the needlewoman’s body is endangered by the city’s corruptions, and that to prevent or halt this corruption, is to reverse social dissolution. The following section explores the chain of associations between the needlewoman, commercial cultures and urban disease. In tracing the gothic legacy of the needlewoman, it begins to trace the ways in which Besant’s novel is haunted by a female body made monstrous by consumption of the synthetic spectacles of modernity and the corrupt touch of the working-class male. This understanding in turn contributes to the identification of the commodity’s production of urban horror – of phantasmagoria as disease.

Needlework had longstanding associations with domestic femininity, even with gentility. However, its strongly gendered associations, together with the structure of the metropolitan labour market, meant that the social and cultural figure of the needlewoman was understood in diverse and contradictory ways. Themes of sexual danger and disease were commonly inscribed upon her body throughout the nineteenth century. Victorian social investigators and novelists sought to explain the relationship between needlework and prostitution, and these explanations afford insight into Besant’s selection of the needlewoman as representative of urban femininity – the biological body which indexes urban dissolution and social advance.

The needlewoman had been an archetype of sweated femininity for decades. Thomas Hood's famous poem 'The Song of the Shirt,' appearing in *Punch* at the end of 1843, served as a plea for the wealthy to address needlewomen's impoverishment, but made no suggestion for concrete reform.¹⁸ Subsequent paintings by artists such as Richard Redgrave and John T. Peel, and contributing to a popular iconography of the 1840s to the 1860s, have been analysed by T. J. Edelstein and Susan P. Caseras. In these images, the seamstress, fighting exhaustion and starvation alone in a spotless garret room, is consistently represented as delicately beautiful: sympathetic 'prototype[s] of the female modern worker', emblems of 'the new hidden problems of the city', of a congenial, passive femininity.¹⁹ Critically, such portrayals, though sanitized, highlighted the engagement of the lone woman and her sexuality with impersonal forces of the metropolis - forces so often evoked through the figure of the prostitute. The potency of these images was grounded in the refined needlewoman's refusal of the wages of sin, so that, 'the figure of the needlewoman and the prostitute were bound together in the Victorian imagination.'²⁰

Moreover, the aristocrat's attempt to seduce the seamstress was a commonplace of popular culture, whether in melodrama, or in great industrial novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *Ruth* (1853), which linked the needlewoman, albeit with compassion and insight, to ruinous romantic fancies, to seduction by the married cad, to unmarried motherhood, and to slum fevers. Vitally, bound up with these dangers of sexual seduction was the threat posed by exposure to

¹⁸ Christina Walkley, *The Ghost in the Looking Glass: The Victorian Seamstress* (London: Peter Owen, 1981), pp.130-134; T.J. Edelstein, 'They Sang "The Song of the Shirt": The Visual Iconography of the Seamstress', *Victorian Studies* 23 (1980), 183-210 (pp. 184-185); Susan P. Caseras 'Weary Stitches': Illustrations and Paintings for Thomas Hood's 'Song of the Shirt' and Other Poems' in *Famine and Fashion*, ed. by Harris, pp. 13-39 (pp. 19-24).

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 37; Edelstein, p. 205.

²⁰ Helen Rogers, '"The Good Are Not Always Powerful, Nor the Powerful Always Good": The Politics of Women's Needlework in Mid-Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, 40 (1997), 589-623 (p. 517).

commercial displays of finery: sensual luxury could produce moral pollution and an inappropriate desire to consume on the part of the impoverished female. A range of literary and sociological commentaries traced prostitution to sexual-sartorial voracity.²¹ One cultural historian goes so far as to claim that the narrative of the seamstress which ends with prostitution, or death, or both, was ‘almost inescapable’ during the nineteenth century.²²

Such narratives of purity and pollution, of passivity and desire, influenced the work of early sociologists. The middle decades of the century saw a number of scandals relating to death and deprivation among dressmakers in fashionable dressmaking establishments, and in the workrooms of the West End’s phantasmagoric show shops: the shadow of prostitution haunted the public discourse surrounding such episodes.²³ Rogers has examined in-depth the way in which the investigations carried out for the Children’s Commission of 1842 presented needlewomen in terms of infantile helplessness, while suggesting that they were well-known for their immorality. Thus, as Rogers asserts, social investigation was freighted with ‘powerful cultural narratives about the nature of the single woman worker’.²⁴ Subsequent revelations, provided by the journalist Henry Mayhew, of slopworkers’ pitiful living conditions, sparked public outrage.²⁵ While Mayhew was attempting wider economic analysis when he highlighted the link between needlewomen’s poverty and their

²¹ Mariana Valverde ‘The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse’, *Victorian Studies* 32 (1989), 168-188 is an influential account. See also, Sue Zemka ‘Brief Encounters: Street Scenes in Gaskell’s Manchester’, *English Literary History*, 76 (2009), 793-819; Natalka Freeland ‘The Politics of Dirt in ‘Mary Barton’ and ‘Ruth’’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 42 (2002), 799-818.

²² Beth Harris, ‘Introduction’, in *Famine*, ed. by Harris, pp.1-10 (p 3).

²³ For show shops, which instanced new practices in production and display, see Claire Walsh ‘The Newness of a Department Store: A View from the Eighteenth Century’ in *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store 1850-1939*, ed. by Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (Aldershot: Ashgate 1999), pp.46-71 . For an insight into the complexities of the nineteenth-century market in needlework and the apprenticeship system, see *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the Morning Chronicle 1849-1850* ed. by E.P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo (London: Merlin, 1971), pp. 428-438.

²⁴ Rogers, p. 591.

²⁵ *Unknown Mayhew*, pp. 120-124.

sometime resort to prostitution, needlework was still being linked by investigators for the Royal Commission of 1864 to prostitution through the trope of female exposure to commercial opulence.²⁶ In the years that followed, a number of societies were formed to campaign for better conditions for dressmakers and slopworkers, and there were attempts to ‘solve’ the problem through emigration.²⁷ H. W. Lord’s report on dressmaking for the 1864 Children’s Employment Commission resulted in legislation limiting hours but it was not until 1909 with the passing of the Trade Boards Act, that wage boards were instituted to set minimum wages in some needlework trades centred on the home and in the small workshop.²⁸

This history matters because *All Sorts* represents a co-operative scheme funded by upper-class largesse in fantasy settlement of a problem which paternalist interventions and dozens of co-operative projects spanning decades had failed to resolve.²⁹ The particular sexual and economic tensions surrounding the needlewoman ‘problem’ over many years also produced a lexicon of anatomical horror, which haunts the pages of Besant’s novel. In 1843, Hood’s influential poem referenced ‘Death, /That phantom of grisly bone.’³⁰ Henry Mayhew emphasized the bodily decay of starving needlewomen, detailing ‘pale and hollow countenances’ and ‘emaciated frames’. A number of illustrations depicting the skull or the skeleton combined with the commodity, appearing in the periodical press in the 1840s, pointed up the human cost

²⁶ Ibid, p. 148. Rogers, pp. 596-7.

²⁷ Walkley, pp. 110-125; Rogers, p. 604; Jo Chimes, ‘“Wanted: 1000 Spirited Young Milliners”: The Fund for Promoting Female Emigration’ in *Famine*, ed. by Harris, pp.229-241.

²⁸ Richard H. Tawney, *The Establishment of the Minimum Rates in the Tailoring Industry Under the Trade Boards Act of 1909* (London: G. Bell & Son, 1915); Sheila Blackburn, ‘To Be Poor and To Be Honest... Is the Hardest Struggle of All’: Sweated Needlewomen and Campaigns for Protective Legislation, 1840-1914’, in *Famine*, ed. by Harris, pp.243-257.

²⁹ Attempts by Christian Socialists, elite feminists and radical philanthropists to run needle trade co-operatives in London had either failed in themselves, or had failed to impact in any meaningful way on wider trade practices: Walkley, pp. 103-105; Blackburn, pp. 246-7; Walter Besant, *Autobiography of Sir Walter Besant* (London: Hutchinson, 1902), p.249.

³⁰ See Thomas Hood ‘Song of the Shirt’ at Walkley, p. 131-2.

of the clothing trade, the most infamous example being ‘A Shroud As Well As A Shirt’ (1848).³¹ In an important paper, Beth Harris explores the way in which the moment *mori* was reworked in a number of images in this period, ‘de-mysifying the commodity, and re-inscribing it with a visible and melodramatic image of the conditions of its production’ to censure vain consumers – specifically, well-off women – for effectively murdering needlewomen.³²

These images, in which urban dazzle is reinvested with poverty and death, foreground a rank and destructive physicality lurking under feminine corporeal allure, whether on the part of the needlewoman or her morally corrupt customer. And just as the figure of the starving dressmaker endangered by seduction, by vice or by death, was a staple of the Victorian imaginary, so too was the image of the prostitute as walking carrion, polluted in mind and body, heading for a syphilitic death – or perhaps to the river, to drown herself. This was not, as Nina Attwood reminds us, an image which lacked nuance or which went unchallenged in feminist, literary or indeed medical discourses, but certainly the prostitute’s face as apparently healthy surface masking or prefiguring putrid flesh or skull was culturally familiar throughout and beyond the nineteenth century.³³ The needlewoman and the prostitute, icons of urban femininity, shared a death’s head.

³¹ Thompson and Yeo, pp. 430-432; ‘A Shroud As Well As A Shirt’ *Punch* 15 (1848), 76. This image of a shirt decorated by skulls was published by *Punch* during one of its attacks on the London firm Moses and Son.

³² Beth Harris ‘All that Glitters is not Gold: the Show-Shop and the Victorian Seamstress’ in *Famine*, ed. by Harris, pp. 115-137 (p.133).

³³ Nina Attwood, *The Prostitute’s Body: Rewriting Prostitution in Victorian Britain* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), pp. 7-12; Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Imagery of Illness from Madness to Aids* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 252- 256; Alain Corbin, ‘Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations’ in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley; New York; London: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 209-219.

Moreover, while the dressmaker's exhausting work might result in maladies including digestive disorders, blindness and consumption, the very clothes on which she worked were often cited as agents of pestilence - carriers of social guilt – travelling the city and entering elite homes. This process seems evocative of fears that venereal disease might enter the seemingly respectable household, tucked deep in the body of sexualized women.³⁴ As Deborah Nord explains, 'Embedded in the language [of the Contagious Diseases Acts] is an association of the prostitute with cholera, typhus, smallpox and other frightening epidemic diseases.'³⁵ Then as the century closed, the body of the needlewoman was identified, with that of other sweated workers, as vector of racial degeneration, parasitic on the social organism.³⁶

It is this figure, icon of urban suffering and of the intersection of the sexual and the economic, habitually discussed in terms of seduction, finery, and bodily horror, to whom Angela first brings her aesthetic mission. Although flamboyant visual cultures contingent on mass production and commerce are not described in the novel, it is structured upon anxiety around female desire, consumption and moral pollution in the modern city. In its pages, as the following section discusses, malleable tropes of porosity and infection abound.

**'AS SHE SHOULD BE':
CULTURE AS INFECTION**

In his seminal study of the consuming, impoverished females to be found in late-Victorian slum fiction, Gill Davies observes that the 'ostensibly liberal and authorial stance [of journalists and novelists writing about the urban poor at the fin de siècle]

³⁴ Nord *Walking*, pp. 82-111; Walkley, p 59; Blackburn, p. 247.

³⁵ Nord, *Walking*, p. 83.

³⁶ Blackburn, p. 248

conceals a preoccupation with the body and appetite, a bourgeois fear of the ‘grotesque body.’³⁷ As I argue, intense anxiety regarding this body of desiring orifices, eating and discharging the city’s poison, is present in Besant’s slum pastoral. It is through curing this female form of its voracity that the city is purged and social dissolution halted.

Such voracity, it was believed, was all-too-easily aroused, and not just by men’s seductive manoeuvres: as the notion of ruinous love of finery indicates, moral habits were considered communicable. Various scholars have discussed the way in which the reading of the ‘wrong’ kind of literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – particularly by women and by the lower orders - was likened to the consumption of unwholesome foods, of drugs and toxins, even to sexual intercourse. Pamela Gilbert neatly situates these anxieties around inappropriate cultural ingestion when she writes that, ‘In the context of the nineteenth century twin horrors – epidemic disease and revolution, the disintegration of the physical and social body – these metaphors [...] body forth the Victorians’ fear of biological and social dissolution.’³⁸

One of the primary means of communicating morality was through the relationships between woman and woman. The ‘rough’ female, like the vagrant, was often portrayed in terms of a pollution which determined her own lack of ‘womanly influence.’³⁹ The fear of the coarsening impact of the older, married woman or dissolute colleague on the young and naïve female worker was a staple of documentary

³⁷ Davies, p.69.

³⁸ Pamela Gilbert, ‘Ingestion, Contagion, Seduction: Victorian Metaphors of Reading’, in *Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Women’s Writing* ed. by Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 65-86 (p. 66).

³⁹ Rachel Vorspan ‘Vagrancy and the New Poor Law in Late-Victorian and Edwardian England’, *The English Historical Review*, 92 (1977), 59-81 (p.68).

representations of the workshop and factory throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ In the case of environments such as the dressmaking workshop, where women shared sleeping quarters, this polluting influence might be transmitted by words and deeds as well as through close contact with diseased female bodies.⁴¹

Conversely, social treatment through exposure to refined femininity – a ‘domestic deity [who] radiated morality’ - and isolation from street-based leisure practices was habitually cast as a form of urban regeneration - a strengthening of the future working-class nuclear family.⁴² The very concept of seduction by finery, after all, turned upon the notion that impoverished women would seek to emulate their ‘betters’, and required careful guidance to avoid the lures of cheap and inappropriate imitation. Angela’s supervision inculcates appropriate desire, ensuring that moral and sensual reform precedes sartorial transformation. And her aesthetics of social purity is presented as endlessly communicable. As Wim Neetens shrewdly outlines,

[Angela’s] workgirls are not emancipated because they make better wages [...] Theirs is primarily an emancipation of the mind, or the spirit: it consists in their ability to participate in pleasures hitherto reserved for the rich. They have become cultured, ‘civilized’ – the products of an unlikely embourgeoisment... Once ‘improved’, the girls will ‘convert’ – civilize and feminize – their brothers and spread a general taste for culture.⁴³

Indeed, Besant’s narrative does frame Angela’s intervention with the people of East London in terms of conversion, but this concept is interchangeable with that of contagion. Her aestheticizing influence is transmitted through her physical presence in the work-room, the drawing-room, the tennis court and the gymnasium. As the

⁴⁰ For example, B.S. Knollys, ‘A Factory Girl’s Day’, *Belgravia*, (1897), 437-444 (p.441); ‘The London Factory Girl’, *Temple Bar* 122 (1901), 315-327 (pp. 320-321); Priscilla E Moulder ‘Factory Life As I Know It’, *Westminster Review*, 178 (1912), 281-287 (pp. 281-286).

⁴¹ Walkley, p. 87; Rogers, pp. 589-623.

⁴² Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989), p.8 ; Maude Stanley, ‘Clubs for Working Girls’, *Nineteenth Century* 25 (1889), 73-83 (p. 74); Lilly H. Montagu, ‘The Girl in the Background’ in *Studies of Boy Life in Our Cities*, ed. by E.J. Uwick (London: J.M.Dent & Co., 1904), pp. 249-254.

⁴³ Neetens, pp. 259-261.

ailments associated with pestilential working conditions are banished and the working women's bodies are nourished and removed from potential sites of seduction (whether by men or by visual and sensual urban cultures), Angela prevents the circulation of urban poisons and spreads a veritable culture-bug. As larger and larger numbers of the community attend the drawing-room to drink in the civilizing entertainments provided, they contract Angela's refinement as one might contract influenza: 'Those who conversed with her became infected with her culture' (123). Lawn tennis and gymnastic activities also 'spread' across Stepney from Angela's co-operative project in 'a spirit of emulation' (90), contributing to development of mind, body and spirit.

In opposing apparent sterility with life, beauty, nourishment and hygiene, Angela stands against debased modes of working-class femininity, linked with commercial aesthetics. Anxieties around the baleful interaction of the organic and the synthetic, and the paradigm of artifice as contagion, are elaborated in later slum fictions by writers such as George Gissing, Arthur Morrison and W. Somerset Maugham in the context of a fast-expanding commodity culture. The essential difference is, that, as their 'heroines' revel in cheap dazzle, their contaminated bodies bringing forth only abortion, the latter writers are not hopeful of social-biological cure.

Writing in 1880, however, Besant conceives Angela's close individual work with her employees in terms of sunshine and managed fecundity. Her mission turns upon the nourishment and beautification of what is ugly – including the intellect, demeanour, and flesh, of the 'girls'. She strives to elevate spiritually through acquainting the poor with natural beauty – not least her own.⁴⁴ Those impoverished

⁴⁴ As Diana Maltz notes, the term 'brightness' in the context of the influential aura and appearance of lady visitors in Octavia Hill's projects 'all at once connotes a sanitary gleam, a moral untaintedness and the charisma of aesthetic ornament': Maltz, *British Aestheticism*, p. 51.

workers who have not benefited from Angela's mission are depicted as forms made grotesque by industrial exploitation 'joyless maidens, loveless maidens [... who] stooped their shoulders and dragged their limbs' (108). Under Angela's care, such women work among flowers while 'the roses came back into their cheeks' (107): this urban pastoral reconnects the alienated dressmakers to the lost bucolic with which the figure of the needlewoman had long been associated.⁴⁵ As Angela works against the polluting artificialities of the city, a sense of enrichment, of embedding, extends to the Palace of Delight itself. The building is envisioned as a culturally-stimulating entity to be 'plant'ed in a place of gloom, and to transform it into a 'City of Sunshine' (134-5). It is through 'catching' this sunny aura that working-class women themselves become carriers of culture: the trope of infection is essential in the vision of urban cure.

This is made clear in the scene in which Harry's revolutionary cousin Dick Coppin is 'silenced' and 'converted' to Angela's mission when exposed to her arguments - 'the influence of a woman' (143). He encounters the reformed seamstresses, the literal embodiment of urban reform, and realizes that, 'infected' with Angela's gentility and her capacity for uncomplicated joy, they can now exert influence on their own behalf. Thus will the young men of Stepney Green be made susceptible to moral and intellectual development at the Palace of Delight. (Hence, Harry's confidence in bringing 'raw lads – recruits in the army of Culture', to the drawing room (245).)

Dick Coppin recognizes that social redemption is carried in the now-healthy bodies of the young women, whose reform is manifested in altered sexual conduct: '[G]irls who laughed with men on the street are changed' (142). They are now

⁴⁵ Edelstein, pp. 205-210.

‘behaving more quietly and modestly than he had ever known them to behave’ (142).

This demureness marks the women as vectors of civilization: as they bring their friends to the drawing-room, ‘their influence spreads’ (142). ‘[I]f we could get our principle established,’ Angela informs Dick, ‘we shall accomplish a greater revolution than the overthrow of the House of Lords and the Church, and one far more beneficial’ (142). The initial stage of this social ‘revolution’ is Angela’s command of the impoverished female body, which is presented in the narrative as open, uninhibited, and in need of regulation. As the next section argues, this disorderly woman consumes and carries all that is destructive in the modern city - with her eyes and with her mouth, within and upon her body.

**‘THIS CONTAGIOUS DISORDER’:
LOCATING THE GROTESQUE FEMALE CONSUMER
IN BESANT’S STEPNEY GREEN**

Even so positive an urban vision as that written in *All Sorts*, which rejects narrow notions of heredity, is haunted by the figure of a voracious consumer-prostitute, reifying modernity’s horrors. My discussion of the novel has so far highlighted the novel’s uses of tropes of cultural infection and the habitual association of the needlewoman with an inappropriate emulation, sexual ruin, and gothic visions of the prostitute’s rotting body. Developing this same discussion, the following section seeks to uncover the presence of the visceral, grotesque body within the text. This is the body which all of Angela’s aesthetic formulations are designed to purify.

This close reading, which explores those refined narratives of love of finery which developed in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, is important to my

thesis. Not only does it spotlight the ways in which antipathy to a sexuality contingent on the accessibility of mass-produced fashions shapes Besant's portrayal of the women of Stepney Green. It shows how working-class women at this time accessed finery to present an unsettling mobile phantasmagoria on the city's streets. And it lays the foundations for the identification of tropes of broader, more insistent, and contaminating urban spectacles, linked to the production of the death's head and abortion, in texts of documentary and fiction produced in the 1890s.

The text of *All Sorts* draws only three needlewomen as in any sense individuals: Rebekah Hermitage, a financially shrewd religious zealot; an unnamed 'lame girl' who sobs at the sight of a plate of roast beef (91, 109); and Nelly Sorenson, beautiful and sensitive, who lives with her father in an almshouse and who dresses in 'a frock of sober black' (66). Nelly's plain, dark clothes are worth noting because they signify from the first her propriety - what Lynda Nead has called the 'quiet' clothing and attitude believed to signal that masculine attention in public was not sought.⁴⁶ And in this, of course, Besant is defining Nelly against a different, yet closely-related, femininity. The discourses which contrasted the impoverished needlewoman who resisted the lure of immoral earnings while producing luxurious garments, with the purchasers of those garments, were longstanding:

[T]he seamstress was consistently represented in this period as the virtuous and modest other of a vain and narcissistic femininity. She was constructed as an unassuming figure that shunned the gaze, while her debased other constituted herself as an object, and sought out the gaze. [...] In this construction, that which solicits the gaze is associated with the false allure of the representatives of modernism: the city, the female consumer, the prostitute, and the commodity.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Nead *Victorian Babylon*, p. 64.

⁴⁷ Harris 'All that Glitters' in *Famine* ed. by Harris, p. 117; Rosy Aindow, *Dress and Identity in British Literary Culture, 1870-1914* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp.104-5.

By the late nineteenth century, this rich and unstable bundle of juxtapositions and connections was being reframed and arguably intensified in the context of an expanding commodity culture and the developing discourses of social medicine and sexology.⁴⁸ At the fin de siècle, middle-class women's consumption was being pathologized with increasing precision in the figure of the kleptomaniac - the shopper tempted by luxurious goods and their glittering commercial display in increasingly sophisticated commercial environments. More positive framings of consumerism were in tension with authoritative discourses in which, the moneyed female shopper might be driven by periodicity and sexual desire, not only to swoon over silks, but to cunningly thief. She was seduced into transgression as surely as the lower-class woman tempted by finery.⁴⁹

Yet while, as Mary Louise Roberts puts it, the consumer-kleptomaniac stood as both 'antithesis and evil twin' to the commodified figure of the prostitute, a mass market in bright, inexpensive clothes which offered an eye-catching sartorial style to working-class women now added to the commercial glare of the city – and appealed further to the long-established anxieties around female appetite and social upheaval.⁵⁰ The dazzling hues available to clothing manufacturers from the mid-century onwards were inevitably identified by elite observers with cheapness and vulgarity, even with primitivism:

Aniline [synthetic] dyes were especially vivid, even lucid, and became comparatively inexpensive to produce [...] The metaphoric associations of colour were inextricably tied to its value in the market. [...] Grant] Allen naturalizes the choice of red as the favourite colour of the central African, the

⁴⁸ Lawrence Birken, *Consuming Desire: Sexual Science and the Emergence of a Culture of Abundance, 1871-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁴⁹ Patricia O'Brien, 'The Kleptomania Diagnosis: Bourgeois Women and Theft in Late Nineteenth-Century France', *Journal of Social History*, 17 (Autumn 1983), 65-77; Tammy Whitlock, 'Gender, Medicine and Consumer Culture in Victorian England: Creating the Kleptomaniac', *Albion*, 31 (1999), 413-437.

⁵⁰ Mary Louise Roberts, 'Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture,' *American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), 817-844 (p. 818).

baby, and the London serving maid [in his 1892 book *The Colour-Sense*]. However, he does not mention that the yards of red calico, bunches of rags, and scarlet ribbons they admire and jump at are cheap fabrics dyed with aniline colours. While the baby and primitive are lumped together for their unreflexive, physiological response to bright colours, the London serving maid [...] is criticized for mimicking her social betters.⁵¹

Thus for many commentators the ostentatious colours, feathers and high hats which were habitually associated with young working (-class) women might connote moral and biological degeneration. While dark garments might obscure the dirt, evocative of moral taint, which stained the clothes of labouring women, the prostitute was assumed to use 'loud' clothing to attract custom.⁵² It was not only the shopgirl who might become 'a spectacle through her dress and demeanour [...] complicat[ing] the definition of the urban crowd as site for anonymity'.⁵³ A range of sweated workers gained access to this flamboyance. The 'feather club' was common among impoverished working women, and was often viewed as the symptom of unwholesome influences in the workplace. It was consistently linked not only with all that is vain and artificial, but with gambling, with unsatisfactory forms of credit, and with drinking clubs.⁵⁴

The means by which 'extravagant' clothing was obtained contrasted with the kinds of clothing and savings clubs commonly instituted by cultural and religious missionaries. Nonetheless, in her investigations for the Booth inquiry, Clara Collet detected principles of rationality and solidarity at work when reporting on the 'remarkable power of combination' exhibited by East End match girls through their

⁵¹ Alison Victoria Matthews, 'Aestheticism's True Colours: The Politics of Pigment in Victorian Art, Criticism, and Fashion' in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. by Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), pp. 176-8. Matthews is quoting Grant Allen, *The Colour-Sense*, 2nd edn (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1892), p. 229.

⁵² Aindow, pp. 96-101.

⁵³ Sanders, pp. 39-40

⁵⁴ Knollys, p.442; Moulder, pp. 285-6; A. Gleig, 'Some Account of a Slum', *Monthly Review*, 22 (1906), 111-120; 'The Factory Girl's Feather Hat', *London Journal* 139 (1890), 13-14.

feather clubs; subsequently Booth expressed the hope that the emerging New Unionism was ‘teaching the girls that a ‘a feather club’ is not all that combination can do for them.’⁵⁵ But not all observers were this unjaundiced.

The dressmaker or shopgirl tempted by sumptuous sights, the maid made giddy through close contact with her employer’s attire and the factory girl drawing lots in the hope of acquiring a new plush hat of up to eighteen inches in height, in ‘bright shrimp pink’: ultimately, these figures were alike implicated in gender- and class- specific narratives of defective emulation.⁵⁶ They were commonly framed in terms of seduction and contamination by ‘finery’, leading to moral-physical degeneracy and social instability. In this vein, an article by Mary Jeune suggests that cheap clothes demoralize the working classes by eroding their sense of resignation:

The East-End factory girl, with her ‘Gainsborough’ hat and her ‘Bang’ [fringe], is only a coarse imitation of what she thinks the lady of fashion in the West End must be; and the servant-maid who spends all her small wages in a slavish imitation of her mistress, and emerges up the area steps on Sunday so gorgeously apparelled that she is almost unrecognizable, is another instance, and one that comes home to us more nearly. [...] There is no unmixed good, no unmixed evil in life; but it is certain that cheap clothing and finery has tended to destroy the spirit of thrift among the working women of England, and, by enabling them to dress out of their station, has increased the temptations with which their life abounds.⁵⁷

Angela’s concern to check the ‘loudness’ of her employees signals a horror of just this kind of thriftless self-display. I would argue, moreover, that it is not only indiscrimination of money doles that is countered by a desire for refinement: it is the visceral body of excess and desire, of consumption and contamination. Ultimately, in reforming her employees’ tastes, Angela is fighting against a supposedly

⁵⁵ Collet, Clara, ‘Women’s Work’ in *Labour and Life of the People*, ed. by Charles Booth and others, 2 vols in 4 (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1889), I pp. 406-476 (pp.475-6); *Life and Labour of the People in London, second series: Industry*, ed. by Charles Booth and Others, 5 vols (London: Macmillan & Co., 1903) II, p. 107.

⁵⁶ ‘Factory Girl’s Feather Hat’, p. 13.

⁵⁷ Mary Jeune, ‘Extravagance in Dress’, *National Review* 20 (1893), 794-804 (p.802).

indiscriminate consumerism. Gill Davies' analysis of the work of fin-de-siècle slum authors such as George Gissing and Arthur Morrison identifies their representations of a 'horrifying' impoverished female body embodying sexual and social threat, whose open-mouthed eating and speech are loaded with 'implications of the foreign, the physical bestial.'⁵⁸ While Walter Besant's metropolitan pastoral of 1880 lacks any obviously Amazonian monsters, it is significant that the text returns repeatedly to a grating appropriation of public space by working women, and to the coarse and strident sounds emanating from their bodies. This emanation is (albeit humorously) presented as a cultural infection caused by urban working practices:

If you have the curiosity to listen to the talk of workgirls in the evenings when they walk home, or as they journey homewards slowly in the crawling omnibus. [...] They snap their lips, they breathe quick, they flash their eyes, they clench their fingers, and their talk is a narrative of indignation full of 'sezee' 'sezi,' and 'sezshe' [...] We know how Angela proposed to prevent the outbreak of this contagious disorder by ventilation, exercise, and frequent rests. (88-9)

In selecting plainly-dressed Nelly for her workshop, Angela declares her desire to employ 'good girls – nice girls' (68). Yet the needlewoman who walks the streets and travels by public transport, manifesting 'contagion' through her loudness, her heavy breathing and her snapping lips, is hardly shunning male attention: she is a vector of urban noise and vulgarity, a veritable network of open orifices, allied with a fierce, open gaze. Indeed, the dressmakers of Besant's construction are divided between the 'better sort of girls' (represented by Nelly, Rebekah and possibly the lame girl) and the rest: troubling creatures, sketchy, yet ever-defined by their uncouth, world-embracing physicality. Soon enough, Angela writes in triumph to Constance that 'while they are with me my girls can talk without angry snapping of the lips' (105).

⁵⁸ Davies, pp. 72-3.

A piece written by Besant for the *Contemporary Review* two years after the publication of *All Sorts*, makes for interesting reading in this regard. In it, he positions the factory girl ‘below the shop-girls, the dressmakers, the servants’ of the metropolis. Described in terms of loudness on the street, the factory worker is distinguished entirely from ‘the better sort of girls’ who are ‘generally quiet in their behaviour’. The factory ‘girl’ represented in Besant’s article can seldom use a needle and thread, is often illiterate, and has not yet ‘power of enjoyment’ sufficient to access the improving delights which will be found at the historical People’s Palace. The factory workers need to be nourished in order to absorb wholesome cultural sustenance; so far as Besant is concerned, to be nourished is to be silenced through a wholesome stuffing of the mouth:

Their amusement seems to consist of nothing but walking about the streets, two and three abreast, and they laugh and shout as they go so noisily that they must needs be extraordinarily happy. [...] Would it be possible, one asks in curiosity, to stop the noisy and mirthless laughter of those girls with a hot supper and chops fresh from the grill?? ⁵⁹

Angela is similarly determined to stifle pleasures found on the street; she stands against a public culture associated by many elite commentators with moral and biological contagion.⁶⁰ Besant’s motif of the street-walking seamstress purposely evokes a downward trajectory towards vice and the augmentation of low wages by prostitution, frequently expressed through images of a breaching of bodily boundaries. Way back in 1850, W.R. Greg had written in favour of tyrannizing the prostitute in ways subsequently materialized by the Contagious Diseases Acts. Representing syphilis as an epidemic disease, he likened the mobile prostitute to a plague victim

⁵⁹ Walter Besant, ‘The Amusements of the People’, *Contemporary Review*, 45 (1884), 342-353 (p. 346).

⁶⁰ Standish Meacham, *A Life Apart: The English Working Classes 1890-1914* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), pp.41-2; Mary Poovey, *Making A Social Body* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Walkowitz *City*, pp. 33-36.

‘break[ing] through a *cordon sanitaire*’ to undermine social-racial health.⁶¹ For social purists writing three or more decades later, disease might be the outcome of male vice, but the focus of action is still the sexualized female body. Though the maintenance of social and physical boundaries might best be served through the management of desire, the language of those encouraging the moralization of working-class ‘girls’ in clubs and lodges dealt in tropes of urban plague and engulfment of the social body.⁶²

The initial longing of those employed at Angela’s workshop to leave the elevations of the drawing-room and promenade with (working-class) men, therefore touches upon acute social anxiety (92). A few months of Angela’s work upon the ‘girls’, however, and even Dick Coppin can see that an established culture among the dressmakers of ‘laugh[ing] with men on the streets’ has been replaced with a culture of diffidence (142). Indeed, celibacy appears to be the only option for the needlewomen – for the time being at least. Nelly and Rebekah conclude that it is better they should never marry ‘one of the drinking, tobacco-smoking workmen who would have us’ (270). Such imagery foregrounds a series of associations which were key to elite anxieties around working-class femininity in the city. For as Part Two of this thesis argues, in a number of slum fictions written at the *fin de siècle*, the touch of the impoverished male is often merged with the touch of synthetic wares, to produce moral and physical degradation in women. However, the aestheticized dressmaker’s body as written by Walter Besant - privatized, its boundaries firmed by tennis and ennobling quadrilles - remains firmly closed to such destructive masculinity.

These details are important because such malleable tropes of moral contagion, of poverty as disease, as well as haunting women’s broad participation in city life,

⁶¹ W.R. Greg, ‘Prostitution’, *Westminster Review*, 53 (1850), 283-268 (p.261).

⁶² Theresa Shrewsbury, ‘Prevention’, pp.959-960.

specifically coalesce in fin-de-siècle representations of women's interactions with urban phantasmagoria, not least with the mass-produced fashions worn in the new urban leisure zones. Although it is not described directly, the threat of garish dress and the importance of its eradication is made clear in the text of Besant's novel. On Boxing Day, those attending a concert provided by Angela, Harry and the 'girls' are much impressed by the dressmakers' new found self-respect and refusal of evenings spent 'trapesing (sic) about the streets getting into mischief' (277). The needlewomen's performance enacts their throwing off of the vulgarity and sexuality associated with mass culture – not least because desire for ever-changing clothes was habitually linked to sexual desire.⁶³ The subjects of Angela's experiment embrace simplicity and harmony, rejecting the disordered lines of the gaudy female consumer and adopting (literally) the clean firm sealed boundaries of the monumental body:

[Angela's] girls on this night for the first time showed the fruits of her training in the way they played their parts, their quiet bearing and their new refinement. [...] A beautiful girl, her hair bound in a fillet, clad in Greek dress, simple, flowing graceful, stood upon a low pedestal [...] to represent woman dressed as she should be [...] and there were also] beside this statue, women dressed as women ought not to be: there they were, the hideous fashions of generations; the pinched waists, monstrous hats, high peaks, hoops and crinolines, hair piled up, hair stuffed out (274, 277).

This is the ideal outcome of a comprehensive programme of amelioration - the combination of material improvement, aesthetic moulding and moral training, elements inseparable from one another. This, indeed, is missionary aestheticism as social purity. The women are to inspire the desire for refinement in all those who see them, not least because they have been remodelled as discriminating consumers in their own right, whose superior social manners code the reformation of the messy, sensual body. When the narrator describes the women dining half a year into Angela's supervision, the characteristic 'bold'ness, with its unsavoury associations, has been expunged: 'Six

⁶³ Aindow, p. 112.

months of daily drill and practice in good manners had abolished that look at any rate (264). Angela's employees have been elevated from 'common' homogeneity into tasteful individuality

Before moving on the next chapter, it is worth considering briefly the significant role of Harry Goslett in the reform of urban womanhood. When Harry addresses the Advanced Club, a key theme of his rhetoric is the poor conditions in which East End women (here infantilized as 'girls') labour. Despite the novel's nods to female unionisation, Besant continues a tradition of paternalist and radical discourses in which female workers were presented as helpless victims rather than as legitimate agents in the public sphere.⁶⁴ In the course of a speech to an artisan audience which suppresses the seasonal and sweated male labour characteristic of much of the historical London economy, Harry charges that, of all the working-class men's misdeeds, their treatment of 'the girls' is the worst.

In a formulation suggestive of Vron Ware's assertion that in colonial discourses, 'the position of women could be read as an index of civilization', Besant delineates cultural difference through the depiction of an upper-class masculinity which respects women, and an East End masculinity which does not: 'You leave them to the mercies of employers who have got to cut down expenses to the last farthing [...] The girls grow up narrow-chested, stooping, consumptive. They are used up wholesale. And what do you do for them? Nothing' (199).⁶⁵ While unthinking contempt for women is shown as typical of male working-class characters (241),

⁶⁴ See Rogers.

⁶⁵ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso 1992), pp. 250-251. See also Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Context* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 5-8.

Harry's masculinity involves a vigorous missionary style, a rejection of coarseness, and chivalry in the face of the sexual insinuations of proletarian men (143).⁶⁶

This matters because the handsome, cultured Harry is used by Angela as superior masculine bait, helping to keep the young women of Stepney off the streets (93). Indeed, exposure to Harry proves vital in reconstructing the women's sexuality. Yet his own demonstration of social purity means that, although Nelly Sorenson becomes an object of aesthetic consumption for him, Harry's interest in her and the other 'girls' is only ever 'brotherly'. Despite beautiful Nelly becoming a 'faithful effigies of a lady' – a product of gradual acculturation opposed to the morally suspect maid swathed in modernity's glare – there is no sexual motive in the friendship Harry offers (266-268). In this narrative, then, it is the artificialities and crudities of working-class cultures which endanger, rather than machinations of the upper-class male. At a time when entering the slum allowed moneyed men access to all manner of illicit pleasure, Harry's purity is represented as instrumental in moral and social healing.

Socialist-feminists including Margaret Harkness and Walter Besant's own sister-in-law Annie Besant would in their different ways dispute his model of class relations, but in doing so, they too mobilized interactive notions of aesthetic seduction, and of feminine corruption and disorder. In the next chapter, I turn to Annie Besant's representations of match women employed by Bryant and May, in journalism produced in 1888, during their successful and important strike action. Analysis of

⁶⁶ For the emergence of relevant concepts of masculinity during the Victorian age, see John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays in Gender, Family and Empire* (Harlow: Pearson Longman 2005); John Springhall, 'Building Character in the British Boy: The Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-Class Adolescents 1880-1914', in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, ed. by J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 51-74; Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 7-34.

Annie Besant's writings will develop those connections already made between modernity's economic and sexual dangers, and feminine bodily horror. In so doing, it contributes to my investigation of the ways in which, in an expanding commodity culture, commercial spectacle – manifested in clothing, in display windows, and at large-scale sites of commercial leisure– was ascribed contaminating and gothic influence at the fin de siècle.

Chapter Two

‘THE PUTREFYING WOUNDS OF SOCIETY’:

ANNIE BESANT’S ALARMING MATCHWOMEN, 1888

The match ‘girls’ strike of 1888, in which the vulnerable, largely female workforce of matchmakers Bryant and May struck successfully over wages and fines, has been identified by a numerous scholars as important to the history of trade-unionism.¹

Lasting for a fortnight, the strike resulted in the abolition of fines and deductions and the formation of the Matchmakers Union, providing inspiration for the New Unionism – the unprecedented organization of a range of unskilled workers. My discussion of representations of match women produced during the strike has been informed by the scrupulous investigations of the historian Louise Raw, which have revealed the suppressions and distortions necessary to shaping the myth of Annie Besant (Walter Besant’s remarkable sister-in-law) as organizer of the strike itself.²

Annie Besant’s interest in pay and conditions at Bryant and May was prompted by a lecture given to the Fabian Society by Clementina Black on behalf of the Consumers League, which campaigned against the ‘sweated’ industries. To be sure, the publication of Besant’s article detailing interviews with the match women, was material to the initial walk-out.³ The publicity which Besant’s journal *Link*, the radical

¹Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), pp. 388-389; Ann Stafford, *A Match to Fire the Thames: The Match Girls’ Strike of 1888. The Dockers’ Strike of 1889* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1961); Pauline Gregg, *A Social and Economic History of Britain 1760-1965* (New York: Pegasus, 1967), p.389; William J. Fishman, *East End 1888: A Year in a London Borough Among the Labouring Poor* (London: Hanbury 2001), pp. 287-289; Louise Raw, *Striking A Light: The Bryant and May Matchwomen and their Place in History* (London: Continuum, 2009).

²Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Rosemary Dinnage, *Annie Besant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986). In this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, the surname Besant refers to Annie Besant, not to Walter Besant.

³Norbert C.Solden, *Women in British Trade Unions, 1874-1976* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), p. 30; Taylor, p. 207. For the remarkable Clementina Black, novelist, social investigator and labour activist, see Livesey, *Socialism*, pp. 53-72; Emma Francis ‘Why Wasn’t’ Amy Levy More of a

Pall Mall Gazette and *Justice*, organ of the (Marxist) Social Democratic Federation (SDF), provided important publicity. And it is true that members and associates of the Fabian Society and the SDF were involved in the co-ordination of a strike fund, which was distributed to match makers at Charrington's Assembly Hall on Mile End Road.⁴ However, Raw argues convincingly that Besant's famous initial article, 'White Slavery in London', was intended to publicize Bryant and May's iniquitous practices and encourage a consumer boycott of its products, rather than to precipitate any industrial action.⁵

Annie Besant's place in customary narratives, that of bourgeois 'leader' descending on East London to rescue helpless 'girls,' has obscured a tradition of industrial action among East End match women.⁶ Besant's representations of the match-women and of her own role in the strike, appearing in her journal the *Link*, have contributed significantly to the mythology of her strike leadership. It is these representations with which this chapter is concerned. In reading these texts, the following discussion insists upon the malleability of the discourses of moral taint, disease and degeneration, the instability of texts, the combined mobilization and challenge to potent stereotypes offered by a range of Victorian commentators. Accordingly, while Annie Besant's initial, theatrical article 'White Slavery' depicts the matchwomen as 'pitiful, poverty-stricken children, unaware or uncomplaining of their exploitation', this chapter argues that Besant's depiction of the helpless ingénue

Socialist? Levy, Clementina Black and Liza of Lambeth' in *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, ed. by Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp.47-69. See also Liselotte Glage, *Clementina Black: A Study in Social History and Literature* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter – Universitätsverlag, 1981).

⁴ Annie Besant, 'Registering the Strikers', *Link*, 14 July 1888, p. 4; Annie Besant, *Annie Besant: An Autobiography* (London: T. Fisher Unwin/The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893), p.336; [Frederick Charrington?] *An Oasis in the Desert – Frederick N. Charrington, LCC* (London: Great Assembly Hall, 1889).

⁵ Raw; Annie Besant, 'White Slavery In London' *Link*, 23 June 1888, p. 2.

⁶ This is Raw's exhaustively-researched thesis.

intersects with that of the prostitute and the revolutionary. The matchwomen produced in Besant's articles, 'poor friendless children', 'undersized because underfed, oppressed because helpless' are simultaneously ciphers of social dissolution. Their undernourished frames harbour a potential for hunger-induced 'harlotry'.⁷

To analyse texts written by Annie Besant during the summer of 1888 is to trace themes and tropes key to my reading of late-Victorian narratives of impoverished femininity, the medical-moral threat of the industrial and phantasmagoric city. This chapter continues to develop a thesis of urban horror and the infectious commodity, by moving across interrelated cultural histories. The discussion borrows from histories of consumption, and of moral-medical discourses, as well as from nineteenth-century theories of a feminized mob. Through careful close reading, the depiction of horrors inflicted on the body by the industrial disease phosphorous necrosis, is linked to the matchwomen's mobility, and to their charged confrontation with the closed, monumental body of Gladstone.

While Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* is haunted by themes of toxic ingestion, contagion, decomposition and veiling, and the merging of economics and sexuality, these themes are made visible by Annie Besant. Through analysis of her texts, I start to explore a set of cultural and psychoanalytical associations between the commodity, the veil, the death's head, decapitation, castration, and a fear of sudden, radical social change. These associations will re-emerge in the second section of this thesis, where they are revealed to be structuring elements of depictions of women's relationship to new public cultures and the 'finery' of the city streets in a number of English naturalist slum fictions.

⁷ Annie Besant 'White and Black Lists', *Link*, 30 June 1888, p.1; Besant, 'White Slavery', p. 2.

EXCESSIVE BODIES: SEX, THE VEIL, AND 'PHOSSY JAW' IN BOW

In contrast to her brother-in-law's Utopian fantasy of 1882, the journalism produced by Annie Besant in the summer of 1888 spells out distinctly the sexual danger which confronts London's poorly-paid woman workers – in this case, women working for match manufacturer Bryant and May. In this sense, her work fleshes out the shadows haunting *All Sorts and Conditions*: the prostitute and the body of excess. There is nothing ambiguous about the matchwomen's wandering on the streets of the metropolis, as written by Annie Besant. Prostitution awaits those who are forced by penury 'into a life of shame'.⁸ Her writing presents the matchwomen as ones 'flung outside' to either 'die or go on the streets' once their health has been broken by factory labour.⁹ These notes of corruption are extended and complicated as she scrutinizes modes of toxicity, ingestion and stench associated with the firm's industrial processes. Her article addressed 'To the Shareholders of the Bryant and May Company, Limited' notoriously presents her readers with the 'ghastly vision' of fifteen-year-old female workers 'slaved out of beauty', their hair scraped away through the conveying of boxes. But just as perilous to health and femininity are the conditions in which the matchwomen *eat*:

Do you know that these 'female hands' eat their food in the rooms in which they work, so that the fumes of the phosphorous mix with their poor meal and they eat disease as seasoning to their bread? Disease, I say; for the 'phossy jaw' that they talk about means caries of the jaw, and the phosphorous poison works on them as they chew their food and rots away the bone. Your foremen have sharp eyes. If they see a girl's face swell they know the sign, and she is sent off and gets no pay during her absence.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid: 2.

⁹ Besant, 'White Slavery', p. 2.

¹⁰ Annie Besant, 'To the Shareholders of the Bryant and May Company, Limited', *Link*, 14 July 1888, p. 1.

This passage highlights cases of disease resulting from exposure to white or yellow phosphorus, used in the manufacture of ‘lucifer’ (easy-strike) matches. The symptoms of phosphorous necrosis included loss of teeth and suppuration of the facial bones.¹¹ In Besant's account, Bryant and May's employees absorb – they literally swallow - the disease produced by the industrial metropolis ‘as seasoning to their bread.’ She writes of malignant forms of ingestion, threatening a disintegration of the face - of femininity itself. And she does so in the context of widely-circulating tropes of porosity and infection connecting the exploited female worker with the image of the death's head.

Besant's reference to the match women as ‘slaves,’ has especial significance in this regard. She was mobilizing a metaphor which had been used by labour reformers for over sixty years, but the analogy had also been applied to the prostitute by campaigners against the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs).¹² If use of the term ‘slave’ suggested a lack of agency on the part of the oppressed, however, Annie Besant's previous writing on the Acts had promised that vice and fury would break the bounds of the tyrannized female body, rebounding upon her exploiters. In so doing, she associated the commodified woman with epidemic disease and social disaster:

As surely as typhoid results from filth and neglect, so does the scourge of syphilis follow in the wake of prostitution. These unfortunate women who are offered up as victims of man's pleasure, these poor white slaves sold for man's use, those become their own avengers, repaying the degradation inflicted on them, and spreading ruin and disease among those for whose wants they exist as a class.¹³

¹¹ Lowell J. Satre, ‘After the Match Girls’ Strike: Bryant and May in the 1890s’, *Victorian Studies* 26 (1982), pp.7-31. For symptoms of phosphorous necrosis, see Reg Beer, *Matchgirls’ Strike 1888: The Struggle Against Sweated Labour in London’s East End* (London: National Museum of Labour History, 1979), p. 25.

¹² Rogers p. 611.

¹³ Annie Besant, *The Legislation of Female Slavery in England* ([n.p.] [n.d], pamphlet 1885; (First publ. *National Reformer*, 4 June, 1876)), p.3.

Her exposé of the matchwomen's suffering reproduces images of male power scrutinizing the impoverished female body for disease ('Your foremen... know the signs'), reminiscent of feminist narratives of protest against the CDAs. As the inspection of suspect prostitutes under the Acts had - so abolitionists argued - victimized women while tolerating male sexual consumption, so Annie Besant's match 'girls' suffer for the class privilege and immorality of shareholders. In this case too, men are paid and authorized to study the bodies of vulnerable women for signs of disease.

Besant directs much of her ire at the firm's clergyman-shareholder, imagined sitting in his 'cosy rectory'. Here, she frames shareholder indifference to ethical considerations in terms of essentially dissolute practices of consumption – whether of dividends, of fine foods, or of delightful *objets d'art*. What Besant effectively offers is a critique of social deficiency, in which an unthinking elite delights in its cultural capital and feasts upon commodified aesthetic goods. Significantly, the figure of the churchman, relishing his tasty 'spread' of edibles and the sight of his daughter's golden hair, is paired with that of the aesthete or artist rendered decadent through selfish enjoyment of the 'gorgeous art studio.'¹⁴ Here, the social and metaphoric associations with the exploitation of prostitutes are clear. Representing privileged aesthetic discernment in terms of individuated sensuality, Annie Besant charges its development to alienating labour - to the ruthless destruction of purity, beauty and health. Besant's question, 'Do you not feel a twinge of pain in your own mouths as you think of these ['girls'] being poisoned that your table may be more daintily spread?' disrupts an images of sensuous detachment with one of bodily pain, re-inscribing the

¹⁴ Besant, 'To the Shareholders', p. 1.

dividend, and the pleasurable consumption which it funds, with the toxic means of production.¹⁵

Besant thus mobilizes the familiar fin-de-siècle stereotype of aesthete as consumer, whose taste, however refined, partakes of the solipsistic and fragmentary surface impressions produced by industrial modernity – impressions masking the contaminating slum and the oozing orifice.¹⁶ One does not have to make unrealistic claims for Annie Besant as purveyor of sophisticated materialist analysis of history – as sharing, with her associate William Morris, a materialism placing production at the centre of aesthetic and revolutionary response – to trace the connections she makes between alienating labour, and an aesthetics of alienation. She locates elite taste firmly within the marketplace: within the social. Thus, Besant's assessment of Bryant and May's shareholders as a band of clerical hypocrites and decadents, inhabiting a private space sustained by socially-destructive working practices, counters starkly the romantic vision offered by Walter Besant. In *All Sorts*, the reader is told that, 'To cultivate the sense of pleasure is to civilize.'¹⁷ In writing up Bryant and May as purveyor of toxicity and decomposition, Annie demystifies 'enjoyments purchased by the rich' as indulgences paid for by the exploitation of the poor.

Though Annie's critique and Walter's fantasy both read the evils of the modern city across the labouring female form, Annie reveals that the dividend is tainted by spillage from the impoverished body: delicacies are purchased with 'bloodstain[ed] coin'.¹⁸ She furnishes a grisly transcoding of the oppressed and disfigured

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 1.

¹⁶ Stallybrass and White, p.133.

¹⁷ Besant, *All Sorts*, p. 134. For Annie Besant's own investment in the representations of socialist utopia as prompt to transformative desire, see Waters, pp. 44-45.

¹⁸ Besant 'To the Shareholders', p. 1.

matchwoman and the social body. In writing that '[C]omfortable people object to the veil being torn off the putrefying wounds of society', Besant employs the image of the veil to impress on her readers the existence – the guilt - of slum horrors.¹⁹ Here, the gothic body shadowed by Walter Besant becomes visible, as Annie brings into play a set of connected images telling of sexual and social peril (the city, the diseased visage, the veil, the dangerous porosity of the urban female body).

What I am arguing is, not only that these elements form recurring structuring elements of a range of texts about working-class urban women written at the fin de siècle, but that they are key to organizing narratives in which the activation of a threatening female sexuality, regression, and bodily horror, are traced to phantasmagoric contamination. With this paradigm in mind, it is telling that, having made explicit the risk posed to the matchwomen's virtue by starvation wages, Besant employs the symbol of a veil covering society's 'putrefying wounds'. This image is reminiscent of that used by Henry Mayhew three decades earlier in presenting his investigation into prostitution in London: 'In a word the veil has been raised, and the skeleton exposed to the view of the public.' Mayhew echoes and embodies this metaphor in his description of the veiled prostitute who frequents the city's parks at night, disguising the facial mutilations wrought by syphilis.²⁰ The allure of the commodified woman - the mass article - is only increased by her veil.

It is by way of Annie Besant's veil-waving, then, that we return to the image of the rotting head, which was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to images of the needlewoman. The death's head manifested interwoven terrors of infection, of organic reversion, and social decay. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century,

¹⁹ Besant, 'White and Black', p.1.

²⁰ Peter Quennell, *Mayhew's Underworld* (London: Bracken, 1950), p. 95.

the *momento mori* was being employed by artists and writers to figure, not only the future state of the individual, but the ceaseless processes of reversion and decay afflicting everything in the physical world – not least, the body inhabiting metropolitan modernity. The ‘primitive’ or mouldering face of the prostitute was even viewed by scientists as corroboration of diseased genitalia. The occurrence of disease, or perceived enlargement of the sex organs or buttocks, served to confirm the prostitute's alignment with ‘primitive’ African peoples.²¹

The venereal disease responsible for this corporeal taint had customarily served in literary, sanitary and sociological texts as metaphor for the multiple disavowed social networks linking rich and poor, private and public, virtuous and vicious.²² And as the previous examination of *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* noted, the circulation of beautiful but contaminated clothes produced in squalor might emblemize class guilt. Similarly, Annie Besant uses the image of phossy jaw to figure hidden corruption in the social body. In a metaphoric landscape where the unsanitary, the biologically degenerative and the venereal could co-mingle, phossy jaw may be read as syphilis's twin product of urban filth. Both conditions are identified with the industrial city; both are associated with facial disfigurement.²³ Just as at mid-century the skeleton or skull had been recast to shame the narcissistic female consumer, the journalism produced by Annie Besant (and subsequently by radical newspaper the *Star*), exhibits the labourer's face ravaged by phossy jaw to shame the shareholder-consumer.

²¹ Sander L. Gilman, ‘Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature’ *Critical Inquiry* 12:1 (Autumn 1985), 204-242 (pp. 234-5); Raymond Corbey, ‘Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930’, *Cultural Anthropology* 8 (1993), 338-369 (p. 354).

²² For example, Nord, *Walking*, p. 9.

²³ Barry Reay *Watching Hannah: Sexuality, Horror and Bodily De-Formation in Victorian England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

If the imagery marshalled by Besant incorporates the dangers of prostitution and facial canker, close reading of her representations of the match women's mobility, and their attitude towards the graven image of William Gladstone, allows for the identification of further, culturally pervasive, associations with a grotesque, disorderly and castrating feminine. These associations have been described by the degenerationist scholar Daniel Pick as 'a kind of figurative 'cathexis' between [...] political and sexual terms'.²⁴ What interests me here, is developing these associations in relation to paradigms of industrial-phantasmagoric contamination.

Recent research has located 1888 matchwomen's strike in a 'tradition of industrial militancy'. During the dispute, these 'old hands at protest', as Louise Raw describes them, may well have marched west, from Bow Road and through Trafalgar Square, as they had during previous disputes.²⁵ If so, Annie Besant makes no mention of such a march in reporting the strike. She does however give an account of a visit to Westminster by a deputation of fifty-six match women on 11 July 1888, an event she helped to organize.²⁶ She later recalled that the spectacle of these poorly-dressed women parading through Westminster brought traffic to a standstill.²⁷ Her contemporaneous reporting of the episode in *The Link* merits quoting at length:

As the [fifty-six] girls tramped along the embankment in orderly array, three or four deep, they made a striking object lesson for the careless well-to-do folk who gazed at them with supercilious puzzlement as they passed. Some very young, pale, thin, undersized, ragged, their very appearance eloquent of hard labor [sic] unfit for childish frames. Others, who were still growing physically when wages were better, looked stronger in health, more vigorous and more resistant. [...] But may be some thought, as certainly did one in that strange procession [into Parliament], that the appearance among sleek, comfortable, well-to-do West End folk, who crowded the lobby, of the gaunt, ragged group,

²⁴ Pick, p.89.

²⁵ Raw, pp. 142-150. In evidence of such a march, Raw uncovers intriguing oral history: London: British Library Sound Archive/Roy Palmer Collection, C1023/30: Samuel Webber.

²⁶ Mrs Besant provided refreshments to the women, before accompanying twelve of them to Parliament to be introduced to sympathetic MPs. A. Besant, 'The Revolt of the Matchmakers: A Remarkable Deputation', *Link*, 14 July 1888, p. 4.

²⁷ Besant, *Annie*, p. 175.

representing the suffering of the East, was a portent not lightly to be disregarded by those who will one day have to answer in their own or their children's persons for the ruined lives of these.²⁸

Clearly, Besant ascribes deep metaphoric significance to the women's oppressed frames: they stand as embodiment of the distress of East London itself – and of its revolutionary potential. She reads the signs of future disorder much as a Bryant and May foreman reads the subtle signs of disease.²⁹ She does not elaborate on the ways in which 'West End folk' or their children will have to 'answer' for the 'suffering of the East'. It may be that here, as elsewhere in her journalism, she refers to a supernatural Day of Judgement.³⁰ But as I shall show, Annie Besant's journalism warns that socially cataclysmic force lurks beneath the surface of these suffering match women, and that force is understood in terms of misrule and a visceral, swamping physicality.

Besant relates that following their Parliamentary excursion, the police prevented the matchwomen from catching an omnibus back to Bow, although the women were 'tired and footsore' and 'the march eastwards was very, very long.' The acting Superintendent would not allow them to 'pass along a thoroughfare adjoining the Queen's private park of Trafalgar Square,' thus 'trespassing on sacred ground'.

²⁸ Besant, 'Revolt', p. 4.

²⁹ Annie Besant would also be familiar with longstanding, paradoxical notions of biological and social enfeeblement through her work for the Malthusian League, which she co-founded in 1877 to advocate the promotion of contraception. See Annie Wood Besant *The Law of Population: Its Consequences, and Its Bearing Upon Human Conduct* (London: Freethought, 1882); F. D'Arcy 'The Malthusian League and the Resistance to Birth Control in Late Victorian Britain' *Population Studies* 31 (1977), 429-448; Catherine Gallagher, 'The Body Versus the Social Body in the Works of Thomas Malthus and Henry Mayhew' in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Lacqueur (London: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 83-103 (p.91); see also Thomas W. Lacqueur 'The Social Evil, the Solitary Vice and Pouring Tea' in *Fragments For A History of the Human Body* ed. by Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi, 3 parts (London: Zone, MIT Press, 1989), 3, pp. 334-343.

³⁰ For example in Besant 'To the Shareholders', p. 1-2.

Invoking images of the aristocratic enclosure of common land, she mocks notion – for now - that these women present any manner of threat.³¹

At the time she wrote this article, Besant was involved in the Law and Liberty League (LLL), a campaigning alliance of socialists and radicals. The League opposed Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Charles Warren's decision, taken in November 1887, to prohibit public meetings in Trafalgar Square.³² During the previous two years the Square, an important emblematic space officially presenting a 'concerted attempt to set the history of the nation in stone' had become a site for dissent, and for the exhibition of the bodies of London's poor.³³ In February 1886 it was the setting for a demonstration by the SDF - followed by looting in the West End. During the autumn of 1887, large numbers of unemployed and homeless people had camped in the Square, only to be driven out by the police.³⁴ Annie Besant was active on Bloody Sunday in November 1887, when Irish nationalists, radicals, socialists and trade unionists attempting to enter the Square in defiance of Commissioner Warren's ban, were beaten back by police and soldiers. As a prominent member of the LLL, she was also concerned in the funeral of Alfred Linnell, a bystander trampled by a police horse in the Square one week after Bloody Sunday.³⁵

Besant's ironic assertion that '[T]he danger of the Square being carried by the charge of the Match Brigade was too serious to be faced' may be set against this context of oppressive policing. However, her reportage also suggests that the women's

³¹ Besant 'Revolt', p. 4.

³² Clive Bloom *Violent London: 200 Years of Riots, Rebels and Revolts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 214-225.

³³ Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 2.

³⁴ Jones *Outcast*, pp. 289-296.

³⁵ The funeral had been held at the City of London and Tower Hamlets Cemetery – a quarter of a mile from Bryant and May's factory at Bow, Ibid pp. 296-7; E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin, 1997), pp. 492-495; Andy Love 'Centenary of Bloody Sunday' *History Workshop* 26 (1988), pp. 211-212.

frailty harbours social disorder, and in doing so employs language reminiscent of coverage of Bloody Sunday in those sections of the press, which had described ‘howling roughs’ and ‘dull brutality’ emerging from ‘the most vicious of the slums of a great city’ to take possession of the Square.³⁶ For as Annie Besant intimates, the industrial city may stunt and starve the women, but it also produces ‘resistan[ce]’. Her account of an attack by the ‘girls’ on a statue of Gladstone makes clear that the ‘suffering of the East’ may be converted to terminal violence at any time, courtesy of these unstable bodies.

STONES, BRICKS AND BLOOD: MEDUSA CONFRONTS GLADSTONE

The statue in question was, and is, sited not in Westminster, but in the East End. Commissioned by Theodore Bryant, it was unveiled in 1882 on Bow Road, a short walk from the Bryant and May factory. Embodying energy and authority, Gladstone stands at a topographically and symbolically prominent location – before the gardens of Bow Church, at a fork in the busy thoroughfare – and he is looking westward, towards the financial centre (the City), towards the political and imperial centre (Westminster), and the symbolic domain of Trafalgar Square.³⁷ The sculptor responsible was Albert Bruce-Joy, who had developed a reputation both for superb ideal pieces, and for naturalistic portrait statuary.³⁸ Measuring over nine feet, cast in bronze, and standing on a pedestal twelve feet high, Bruce-Joy’s Gladstone was

³⁶ Thompson, *William Morris*, p.491.

³⁷ For a photograph of the statue shortly after its unveiling, see Winston G. Ramsey *The East End Then and Now* (London: Battle of Britain, 1999), p.279.

³⁸ In the closing decades of the nineteenth century he produced a number of colossal statues of political figures for display in urban centres across Britain. See D.L.T. Thomas ‘Devotion to Natural Form: The Work of Albert Bruce-Joy (1842-1942)’ *Country Life* 171 (1982), 1688-9.

apparently funded by a mandatory discount of one shilling from the matchwomen's wages.

As was his wont, Bruce-Joy was considered to have successfully portrayed an 'everyday' Gladstone within a standard and appropriate sculptural formula. The subject was rendered both recognisable as an individual, and readable as great human actor - as displaying 'a large and reposeful style, breathing the spirit of the sculptor's art', showing 'a familiar oratorical gesture', communicating 'pose and action characteristic and impressive.' Wearing a morning-dress which imparted a 'frankness and simplicity' appropriate to his role within an advanced Parliamentary system, he addresses the highway, brandishing a 'bundle of papers.'³⁹ The Prime Minister who remained peculiarly silent over the brutalities and illegalities of Bloody Sunday is epitomized through the act of public address.

Unsurprisingly, the image had been enthusiastically approved by those Members of Parliament attending a private viewing at Westminster, but it found less favour with the matchwomen.⁴⁰ In an account of the statue's unveiling, apparently based on the reminiscences of Bryant and May employees, Annie Besant presents the women as victims of injustice – and as ciphers of industrialism's horrors. 'Yelling' up at the image of the great orator, they are barbaric forms whose unleashed rage heralds anarchy:

A very bitter memory survives in the factory [...] So furious were the girls at this cruel plundering, that many went to the unveiling of the statue with stones and bricks in their pockets, and I was conscious of a wish that some of those bricks had made an impression on Mr Bryant's – conscience. Later [presumably when luminaries such as Bryant and Lord Granville had withdrawn] they surrounded the statue – 'we paid for it' they cried savagely –

³⁹ *Art Notes* 5 (1882), 29; 'Albert Bruce-Joy', *John Tinsley's Magazine* 18 (1898), 561-565 (p.563).

⁴⁰ *British Architect* 28 April 1882, p. 197.

shouting and yelling, and a gruesome story is told that some cut their arms and let their blood trickle on the marble paid for, in very truth, by their blood.⁴¹

A 'gruesome story' indeed. Or, as this thesis argues, a revealing and important representation of working-class women as urban paradigm. In this discussion, I examine the women's encounter with the Prime Minister's statue in terms of the confrontation between the grotesque body of industrial modernity, and the sculpted canonical figure of Gladstone. In so doing, I explore further a web of connections between urban rot, the veil, the prostitute and the revolutionary occurring in elite texts written at the fin de siècle, which are significant to elite framings of new modes of consumption in terms of infection. Once more, the working-class woman, merging with the figure of the prostitute, signifies the metropolis through the dialectic of attractive or innocuous surface and foul depths.

In Annie Besant's text, the matchwomen confront the clean hard lines of a monumental body metonymically representative of Westminster and of laissez-faire economics, and they display towards it the 'savage'ry which marks those 'Born in slums'.⁴² As discussed previously, Besant elsewhere identifies the city's potential for revolution as something tucked deep inside the women's bodies. At the statue's unveiling in Bow, revolutionary barbarity emerges in their armed assault upon a pristine monument of class and gender privilege. To be sure, Annie Besant spells out the cause of such 'savage'ry' as environmental. For example, she describes the women's honesty and intelligence in meeting members of Parliament, noting 'how much might be made of them under fair and wholesome conditions.'⁴³ Even so, her depiction of collective feminine violence as something emerging from the city's hovels

⁴¹ Besant, 'White Slavery'.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Besant 'Remarkable Deputation', p. 4.

does realize entrenched cultural associations between the revolutionary mob and a supposed regressive ferocity hiding within Woman.

A grasp of the way in which the revolutionary female was imaginatively linked to the prostitute, to decapitation, and to a terror of excess, elucidates the statue scene presented by Annie Besant. Since the 1790s, elite commentators on both sides of the Channel had depicted aspects of the French Revolution in terms of animalistic crowd violence and/or unnatural, relentless terror.⁴⁴ An important development in the historiography of the Revolution came with the work of the conservative intellectual Hippolyte Taine. Unsettled by the myth of female arsonists assaulting Paris as the Commune fell in 1870, Taine set about writing a potent account of the Revolution of 1789 which positioned prostitutes, and impoverished women generally, in the vanguard of mob violence. Taine developed an influential theory of crowd pathology, in which pleasure at the spilling of blood proved positively contagious.⁴⁵ Subsequent ‘scientific’ commentaries cast crowds as prone to instantaneous regression – to an abolition of social hierarchy or sexual difference, inflicting a state of lack.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁴ Important British representations include Edmund Burke *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the proceedings in certain societies in London relative to that event. In a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris* (London: [n.p., 1790); Lacqueur.

It is important, however, not to caricature the representations offered by Burke and Carlyle. An excellent range of discussions can be found in, *The French Revolution Debate in English Literature and Culture* ed. by Lisa Plummer Crafton (London: Greenwood Press, 1997); Lowell T. Frye, ‘“Great Burke”, Thomas Carlyle and the French Revolution’ *Contribution to the Study of World Literature* 87 (1997), 83-106; *Edmund Burke Reflections on the Revolution in France: New Interdisciplinary Essays* ed. by John Whale (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ Taine’s complex theorizing of environmental and hereditary matters proved particularly significant in the literary development of Emile Zola. See, Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, *The Origins of Contemporary France: the Ancien Regime, the Revolution and the Modern Regime (selected chapters)* trans. John Durand (Chicago, London: University of Chicago, 1974); Alan Pitt, ‘The Irrationalist Literalism of Hippolyte Taine’, *Historical Journal* 41 (1998), 1035-1054; Peter Gay, ‘Rhetoric and Politics in The French Revolution’ *The American Historical Review* 66 (1961), 664-676; Susanna Barrows *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 50.

⁴⁶ As with theories of collective psychopathology developed by the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon, who did much to popularize theories of the unconscious and notions of a malleable mass mind at the fin de siècle: Gustave Le Bon, *The Psychology of Socialism* (New Brunswick: London Transaction, 1982); Robert A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage, 1975).

female revolutionary stood as an attack on male privilege and sexuality, not least as instrument of sterility.⁴⁷ The neutering mutilations inflicted by the female, or at least feminized, mob could be tied simultaneously to notions of mechanisation, of urban pathology, of animalism, and of racial extinction.⁴⁸

In an important essay, Neil Hertz has studied accounts of social unrest in France written during the nineteenth century, and finds revolutionary violence embodied repeatedly in a Medusa figure, a poverty-stricken woman ‘depicted not as petrifier but as beheader’.⁴⁹ These accounts, he suggests, are an attempt to evade a more comprehensive social analysis by representing political danger as sexual horror. This link between the veil and the Medusa plays out through Freud’s correlation of castration and decapitation: the male child’s sight of the maternal genitalia – of that which the veil conceals – establishes the fear of castration.⁵⁰ Just as a veil might obscure a woman’s face, the hymen may be conceived as a veil obscuring the vagina.⁵¹ Thus the figure of the gorgon returns us to images of the prostitute’s veil, hidden horror and the death’s head.

Clearly, however, critical recourse to this phallogentric myth of derivation risks the draining social-historical specificity from cultural analysis.⁵² Indeed, Catherine

⁴⁷ Barrows, p. 47; Pick, pp. 89-90; Ginneken, pp. 169-171. In her nuanced analysis, Regina Janes discusses the common eroticization of the guillotine throughout the nineteenth century in terms of a desire for the brutal control of female sexuality, and a fear of that sexuality’s supposed castrating, mechanistic and nature: Regina Janes, ‘Beheadings’, *Representations* 35 (Summer 1991), 21-51.

⁴⁸ Pick, pp. 88-89.

⁴⁹ Neil Hertz ‘Medusa’s Head: Male Hysteria Under Political Pressure’, *Representations* 4 (Autumn 1983), 27-54 (p.27).

⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, ‘Medusa’s Head’ in Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Collier, 1963), pp.212-213.

⁵¹ Particularly in my examination, later in this thesis, of George Gissing’s *The Nether World* (chapter six) and of Arthur Morrison’s ‘Lizerunt’ (chapter eight).

⁵² Important feminist responses to Freud’s narrative include: Hélène Cixous with Annette Kuhn, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1981 (first publ. in *Signs*, 1 (1976) 875-893)), pp.245-264 ;

Gallagher's impeccably historicized response to Hertz's essay only enriches the concentrated symbolic power of Mrs Besant's statue scene. Gallagher reminds us that the mobile, sexually unrestrained woman, can be interpreted as site of chaotic biological and economic production, embodying the expansion of a rampant and unaccountable market economy.⁵³ Yet, at the same time, though Freud's equation of decapitation with castration draws on longstanding cultural connections, it issues from a fin-de-siècle cultural imaginary stalked by innumerable perverted, polluting – and frequently veiled - femmes fatales.⁵⁴

Annie Besant's shocking image of the women's slashed and slippery bodies staining monumental granite, may be read as being at once 'primal', and as an important paradigmatic late-Victorian representation of the outcast city of commodity capitalism reified through the emerging mess and violence of the female form. The crowd theories emerging at the close of the nineteenth century cannot be divorced from the veiled decapitators and vampires to be found in European literature at this time - and nor, I would suggest, can Besant's arresting statue scene.⁵⁵ Moreover, an awareness of the importance of symbolic dismantling or decapitation of statuary at times of radical social change – not least by female members of the 'mob' - would have been heightened in the wake of the French Revolution. Evidently, the mutilation of statuary manifests a loss of domination of physical space on the part of those whose values the figure exemplifies.⁵⁶

'Castration or Decapitation?', *Signs* 7: 1981), 41-55; Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1974).

⁵³ Catherine Gallagher 'More About Medusa's Head' *Representations* 4 (1983): 55-57 (p.55).

⁵⁴ Tosh, p. 118; Kuryluk, p. 93; Showalter *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 182.

⁵⁵ Barrows, p.57.

⁵⁶ William Cohen 'Symbols of Power: Statues in Nineteenth-Century Provincial France' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31:3 (July 1989), 491-513 (pp.492-4); Janes, pp. 21-51; Robin Jeffrey, 'What Statues Tell: The Politics of Choosing Symbols in Trivandrum' *Pacific Affairs* 53:3 (1980), 484-502 (p. 500);

Despite Annie Besant making a weak jest of the threat to Mr Bryant's head from these armed and infuriated women, her article conjures up the entrenched association between decapitation, castration, defloration, and notions of menstrual savagery, which have been discussed by various anthropologists and cultural historians.⁵⁷ The violent figures drawn by Besant breach restraint and corporeal surface, blending disruptions to social, sexual and racial boundaries.⁵⁸ These 'gaunt' frames, marked by the degenerative city, 'shouting and yelling' and smeared with gore, are as suggestive of the anaemic vampire as any middle-class New Woman. Here, it can be argued, is the dangerously mobile and cadaverous figure of the prostitute, lusting scandalously for Gladstone's blood and wealth.

It is likely that Annie Besant – alert to ongoing fear of a revolutionary residuum – aimed to alarm her readers with a culturally powerful portent of social chaos: the closed monumental body on its pediment, embodying individuated rationalism, faces a grotesque and violent feminine. Meanwhile, that she ascribes to the women a measure of political awareness, also attests to the heterogeneity of this representation - working though it does with stock images of feminine disorder and frailty, the savage and the canonical. For Besant depicts the women's motivation as the desire to imprint the statue's pediment with the sign of their exploitation: '[S]ome let their blood trickle on the marble paid for, in very truth, by their blood.'⁵⁹

Thus the matchwomen re-inscribe the image with their blood, just as Annie Besant re-inscribes the dividends of the shareholder: 'You do not mind the bloodstain

⁵⁷Dijkstra, p. 334.

⁵⁸ The fin-de-siècle female vampire-decapitator was linked in various literary and visual texts to syphilis and a craving for blood, money and semen: Dijkstra, p. 351. I employ recent scholarship attending to the link between the figure of the vampire and the New Woman in analysing of Gissing's *The Nether World*: see chapter six of this thesis.

⁵⁹Besant, 'White Slavery', p. 2.

on your coins, but you would not that the world should see it rust.’⁶⁰ The grotesque urban body purposely *opens itself* in order to literalize the guilt carried by the social elite. This work of re-branding through confrontation between the effigy of Gladstone, and the perforated form embodying that which is marginal, disorderly and excluded from the polity, can be read as disruption of a narrative which Bryant and May was seeking to make manifest through the statue itself. Kirk Savage’s formulation is helpful in this connection:

Public monuments are the most conservative of commemorative forms precisely because they are meant to last, unchanged, forever. While other things come and go, are lost and forgotten, the monument is supposed to remain a fixed point, stabilising both the physical and cognitive landscape. Monuments attempt to mould a landscape of collective memory, to conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest.⁶¹

Admittedly, Gladstone’s statue, commissioned to honour a living politician, was not commemorative.⁶² Still, as ‘gift to the East End’ from Theodore Bryant, it materialized the firm’s status and surplus wealth in an object of visual consumption, projecting a narrative of social progress through market economics onto the area’s main thoroughfare.⁶³ As Robin Jeffrey notes, ‘The industrial revolution took much of the art and effort out of statue-making, while its political implications – the need to bring together large numbers of people and to keep them passive and fairly unified – gave renewed importance to ever-present, awe-inspiring symbols.’⁶⁴ In the East End, habitually conceived as a form of anachronistic or exotic space dangerously close to the capital’s imperial centre, Gladstone’s statue can be read as symbol of control imposed on an ‘alien’ landscape in need of regulation.

⁶⁰ Besant, ‘To the Shareholders’, p. 1.

⁶¹ Kirk Savage *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 4.

⁶² This was the first statue of Gladstone erected in London; subsequent monuments were all raised following his death. See ‘The Gladstone Statue in London’, *Manchester Guardian*, 2 January 1905, p. 10.

⁶³ *London Reader* 37 (1881), 311; *British Architect* 28 April 1882, 17 (1882), 197.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey, pp. 498–499.

Of course, monuments can impress – and they can provoke. As Sir Charles Warren’s ban on assembly indicates, Trafalgar Square might concentrate imperial monument and high art, but its size, its location at an ancient junction between the Cities of London and Westminster, and its very symbolic power, made it a focus for occupation and defiance. In Bow, the match women’s actions on the day of the statue’s unveiling jarred the harmonising narrative congealed in its lines. In her account of that day, as in her complex representations of events during the matchwomen’s strike, Annie Besant exhibited the grotesque body produced by laissez-faire economics at an important moment of social-industrial conflict. In these articles, she works with intensity and urgency to invest the moneyed aesthetic pleasure and the city of spectacle with moral, sexual and biological taint, bringing together motifs of toxic consumption, infection and social disorder. Attention to these texts advances the identification of the typology of the commodity and urban horror.

Inevitably, the import of any commodity, any statue, changes over time. That of Gladstone, a commanding, intact and apparently stable assertion of power in the East End of London, standing now above a public toilet, has proved a surface vulnerable to recurrent re-inscription. Far from embodying only and forever a triumphant capitalism manufacturing prosperity for the deserving, the statue is a medium for the conservation of the match women’s protest. In spite of the protective railings which have surrounded it since the 1880s, protestors periodically smear its hands with red paint. Today its surfaces – its scarlet hands - trace violence and class guilt, not to the poor and desperate, but to the Grand Old Man of market economics.

Chapter Three

‘A CHANGE OF FEELING AND TONE’:

FEMINISTS, SHAREHOLDERS AND JOURNALISTS

PROCLAIM HEALTH AND REFORM AT BRYANT AND MAY

As Barbara Harrison writes, although the successful matchwomen’s strike of 1888 pertained mainly to pay, fines and deductions, ‘the match industry and its attendant health risks occupied a particularly prominent position in activism around and official responses to the ‘dangerous trades’ of the 1890s.’¹ This chapter discusses some of the ways in which, in the decade following the strike, socialist and paternalist campaigns highlighted the dangers presented to women’s health in the match-making industry. It examines the apparent coincidence of the interests of Bryant and May with those of liberal feminists and shareholders, and the role played by the factory itself and by the Clifden Institute, an adjacent girl’s club, in writings favourable to Bryant and May.

Differing frameworks and strategies are used by those countering allegations of bodily danger, and hidden cases of phosphorous necrosis, at the firm. While one laissez-faire feminist shareholder locates the causes for disease in working-class indifference to bodily hygiene, another shareholder-journalist presents a traditional narrative of industrial organization and womanly influence working together to reform a grimy and violent urban femininity. The main focus of this chapter, however, is a piece of journalism which repudiates allegations against Bryant and May by mobilizing discourses applauding the achievements of market economics. The article

¹ Barbara Harrison, *Not Only the Dangerous Trades: Women’s Work and Health in Britain, 1880-1914* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), p. 66.

in question is informed by new modes of display and consumption – that is, living exhibits of social and evolutionary progress, common to late-Victorian leisure environments. Effectively, visions of urban horror are countered by images of a commercially-produced bodily and social wholeness.

Images of horror were very much part of the public discourse around match making. In the early 1890s, the trade was legislatively ‘Scheduled’ as subject to special (preventive) rules relating to medical certification prior to employment, hygiene, ventilation, the regulation of dangerous processes, and examination of cases of oral swelling or toothache.² It would appear that this Scheduling was a response to the investigations of radical newspaper the *Star*, which reported in 1892 on a severe case of phosphorus necrosis developed by a woman while working for Bryant and May.³ The newspaper claimed that the company was ensuring silence on the part of other victims by providing financial support - and by the threat of withdrawal of these payments. The *Star*’s journalists reported that hygiene in the firm’s factories was cavalier and that its dipping rooms were less efficiently ventilated than those at other east end matchmaking firms.⁴ Accusing the company of concealing cases of necrosis, the newspaper followed the now familiar strategy of publishing shareholders’ details.⁵

As Carolyn Malone states, newspapers such as the *Star*, and the *Daily Chronicle*, which also ran hard-hitting campaigns relating to ‘female’ health hazards at

² Harrison p. 67; Satre, pp. 18-19.

³ For perspectives on the *Star*, see John Goodbody, ‘The *Star*: Its Role in the Rise of the New Journalism’, in *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914*, ed. by Joel H. Wiener (New York, Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 143-163; Laurel Brake, ‘“Government by Journalism” and the Silence of the *Star*: Victorian Encounters, 1885-90’ in *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers* ed. by Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.213-235.

⁴ Satre, pp. 15-20; Carolyn Malone, ‘Sensational Stories, Endangered Bodies: Women’s Work and the New Journalism in England in the 1890s’, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 31 (1999), 53-55.

⁵ Besant ‘To the Shareholders’, p.2; Malone, ‘Sensational’ p. 56.

work during this period, were '[P]articipating in the contest over women's work, and by extension, women's use of public space' by producing narratives of corporeal danger in which 'working women and their unborn children' were figured as victims requiring the state's help.⁶ Yet for most of this decade, Bryant and May appears to have enjoyed a relatively good reputation with regard not only to pay and lack of fines, but to precautions against 'phossy jaw.' Women did not work in the dipping rooms (where the 'lucifer' matches were dipped in phosphorous).⁷ The company appeared to apply strict safety policies, and it was reputed to ensure good ventilation of work rooms. It also, voluntarily, compensated those suffering from diseases developed through working at its match factories.⁸

The firm fought for this reputation as an exemplary employer by co-operating with well-disposed journalists and arguing that labour conditions and employer-employee relations at the firm had improved since the 1888 strike. Lowell J. Satre points out that despite the investigations of the *Star*, 'In the 1890s writers treated Bryant and May as a model company, both in its modern technology and in its treatment of workers.'⁹ Texts across a range of print media presented the Bryant and May factory as a sanitary and orderly environment while emphasizing the infectious nature of the womanly influence to which the firm's employees were exposed. Such articles sought to legitimize both the working practices of Bryant and May, and its provision of an ameliorative institute for working women.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Thomas Mann, representing the New Unionism on the Royal Commission on Labour, was

⁶ Ibid, p. 50.

⁷ Harrison, p. 69, discusses exclusion of women from the dipping process in the context of questions of gender-based susceptibility at this time; see also Malone, 'Sensational.'

⁸ Beer, pp. 26-28.

⁹ Satre, p.15.

¹⁰ Among the more in-depth texts are: Lloyd Lester; 'The Cinderellas of the National Household: The Match-Makers of East London. A Visit to Bryant and May's', *The Girl's Own Paper*, December 7, 1895 (17), 149-151; and Henry Walker, *East London: Sketches of Christian Work and Workers* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1896).

critical of the sanitary regimes at both Bryant and May, and Palmer and Sons.¹¹ In spite of its work to improve its public reputation, the company of Bryant and May did remain for some observers a focus of contention and anxiety with regard to employee wellbeing throughout the 1890s - particularly female wellbeing in the context of fears of 'racial' degeneration.

In 1898, when Canon Wilberforce was campaigning to prohibit women from working in the production of phosphorous matches, Millicent Garrett Fawcett took action to defend the matchwomen's legal right to work. In a letter published in the *The Woman's Signal*, a temperance-feminist newspaper then under the proprietorship of the suffragist, journalist, and public speaker Florence Fenwick-Miller, Fawcett describes the women as emphasizing their reliance on the money earned from working with phosphorous, and showing confidence in their own methods of avoiding necrosis.¹²

Mrs Fawcett recounts that, she undertook an authoritative questioning of those women who 'dropped in' to a 'girl's club far away in East London.'¹³ As Marian Ramelson points out, Mrs Fawcett's evidence was dubious as 'Every investigator constantly recorded how difficult it was to get working people to say what they really thought, as they regarded inquirers as spies sent out by the firm.'¹⁴ Certainly Mrs Fawcett's account both reproduces and seeks to elide the power relations – the

¹¹ Beer, pp. 28-9; Harrison, p. 75. Thomas (Tom) Mann, trade unionist and socialist who had founded the Eight Hours Movement and played a leading role in the organization of the London gas workers' and dockers' strikes in 1889. At the time of writing his comments on the ventilation issue he was on the verge of becoming Secretary of the Independent Labour Party. Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann, 1856-1941: The Challenges of Labour* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Joseph White, *Tom Mann* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

¹² *Women's Signal*, 4th August 1898, pp. 77-8. For an excellent insight into the *Signal* see Rosemary T. Van Arsdell, 'Mrs Florence Fenwick-Miller: Feminism and *The Woman's Signal* 1895-1899', *Victorian Periodical Review* 15 (1982), 107-118.

¹³ *Women's Signal*, p. 78.

¹⁴ Marian Ramelson, *The Petticoat Rebellion: A Century of Struggle for Women's Rights* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1967), p. 107

subjectivities – which a cross-class encounter in such an environment might produce. Just as the attached editorial is keen to praise the firm and its philanthropic clubhouse, the Clifden Institute, reporting the match women's 'unusually healthy and independent air', so Mrs Fawcett declares that the 'girls' are 'good raw material', 'boisterous' and 'quite able to hold their own.' Simultaneously, *The Signal* asserts that, until such times as the women enjoy the franchise, figures such as Mrs Fawcett must speak for them.¹⁵ Mrs Fawcett declares her own status as Bryant and May shareholder – albeit one who ventures out from the delectable domestic and aesthetic environments imagined by Mrs Besant back in 1888.¹⁶

Fawcett had previously been assured by the management at Bryant and May that 'the great difficulty was in getting the servants of the firm to abide by the precautions [...] to prevent the poison entering the system [...] through decayed teeth, and those with sound teeth and eating their food with properly washed hands are safe'.¹⁷ In her letter to the *Signal*, she effectively endorses the firm's analysis by holding the 'servants' responsible for the contraction of phossy jaw. In her drive to identify women's labour with selfhood, Fawcett invests the matchwomen with a confident autonomy. This proves a problematic investment, however, as it enables Mrs Fawcett to assign the causes of phossy jaw entirely to the actions of individual workers. That is to say, her portrayal of matchwomen as responsible adults making informed choices doubles as depiction of a working-class unreason which produces an insanitary and porous corporeality. Thus is Bryant and May exonerated:

They had no fault to find with their employers [...] there was no fear of necrosis if the workers were careful about washing before eating. 'If yer want to 'ave it, yer can 'ave it; it's yer own fault.' [...] They] thought it was quite a

¹⁵ *Women's Signal*, pp. 77- 78.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 78.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 78.

good joke to take the doctor in and make him believe their teeth were sound when they were not.¹⁸

It is unclear where Mrs Fawcett met the ‘girls’; it is possible that the club concerned was connected with the firm in some way. Wilberforce Bryant was involved in a number of local philanthropic schemes, including soup kitchens catering to his own poorly-paid employees.¹⁹ Following the 1888 strike, Annie Besant had called, in terms reminiscent of those employed in the fictions of her more conformist brother-in-law, for the provision of a ‘drawing-room’ for the young women who worked at Bryant and May’s Bow factory, to offer ‘a bright, homelike refuge to these girls, who now have no real homes, no playground save the streets.’²⁰ Two years later, a girls’ club satisfactory to Annie Besant opened on Bow Road, funded by the theosophist H. P. Blavatsky (Besant having assisted in the hunt for a suitable building).²¹ Inevitably, like any other club – including the club in which Mrs Fawcett encountered her impoverished interviewees – Besant’s Bow Road institute embedded social power relations. But it was far from the only club which would cater to the famous match women of Bryant and May.

The Clifden Institute, founded by Viscountess Clifden following the strike, stood on Fairfield Road, Bow, opposite the factory gates, and it offered a firmly religious, temperance approach to improving the lot of the female workforce.²² The role played by Gilbert Bartholomew, Bryant and May’s managing director, as the

¹⁸ Ibid, p.78.

¹⁹ Satre, p. 14.

²⁰ Qtd in Besant *Annie Besant*, p.337.

²¹ Ibid, p.360.

²² Lester, p.149, *Clifden House Institute: Report... 1896*, p.1; London: London School of Economic and Political Science, Booth Collection, B 178, 63. Lester asserts that Clifden House thrived owing to its religiosity, whereas Besant’s club had by then (1895) failed because it did not offer a religious perspective. He refers to the superintendent Annie Nash as quoting factory girls expressing fear of Besant and her club, and as likening Nash to Jesus Christ. Lester, p.49.

Institute's honorary treasurer, demonstrate its intimate ties to the firm.²³ And there can be little doubt that Clifden House, in providing cooked meals for three pence (as well as limited lodgings), offered valuable practical and nutritional services in an area lacking in places of 'wholesome' refreshment for low-paid females. Fairfield Road in 1897 featured private residences but was taken up mainly with manufacturing and commercial premises - plus agencies of assessment, penalty and exclusion such as the Poplar Union Dispensary, the Union Relief Station and a lunatic asylum. Other than the Clifden Institute, the only nourishment available on Fairfield Road could be purchased in public houses, beer retailers and provision shops.²⁴ Nothing better was offered on adjacent Bow Road in spite of a strong religious-missionary presence.²⁵ Here as on nearby Tredegar Road, there were coffee rooms unlikely to cater to a poor female clientele.²⁶

By 1897, the Clifden Institute restaurant was regarded as a great success, serving fifty to sixty thousand meals a year.²⁷ The management of Bryant and May were now involved in its running, having initially held aloof, and the Institute proved very useful to the firm's efforts to present itself as a model employer. By pointing to its own good working practices and by involving itself in philanthropic enterprise, the firm could claim to have achieved a regime of paternalistic safety and harmony within the walls, both of the Fairfield Road factory, and of Clifden House.²⁸

²³ *Clifden House Institute and Restaurant for Working Girls Report and Statement of Accounts 1896*, p.1 (Booth Collection B178, 67).

²⁴ *Post Office London Directory for 1896: Streets and Commercial* (London: Kelly & Co. Ltd. 1896), pp. 349-350.

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 219-220: Henry Grattan Guinness lived there, directing the East London Institute for Home and Foreign Missions. The road also featured a Presbyterian chapel, Wesleyan mission hall, and a Barnardo's Training Home for Girls.

²⁶ Helen A. Dallas, 'What Are the Interests of Shareholders?', *Economic Review* 7 (1897), 182-194 (p.708).

²⁷ Lester, p.149; Booth B 178, 65.

²⁸ See particularly Lester and Dallas.

An article written by Helen A. Dallas and published in the *Economic Review* in 1897 provides a favourable account of the firm and discloses the conceptual underpinnings of the Clifden Institute - at least in the mind of Mrs Dallas, a shareholder in Bryant and May. In its opening pages, Mrs Dallas, like Mrs Fawcett, casts industrial workers as 'our servants': ethical consumerism, she suggests, can be understood as a reassertion of the gift relationship. In a formulation worthy of Angela Messenger, Dallas informs her elite readers that property in the shape of company shares 'now connects us, not with a dozen tenants, but with thousands of working people.'²⁹ This, she states, is the basis on which she has undertaken her own probe into the firm's practices.

At the centre of her investigation are visits to two of Bryant and May's factories and the perusal of figures, provided by Gilbert Bartholomew, relating to one payday in the previous November.³⁰ Dallas approves the company's pay rates and its standards of ventilation; as for phosphorous necrosis, she is confident that there has not been a case for two years and that, when the disease occurs, 'the patient' is well cared for.³¹ Nonetheless, Dallas exhorts readers to use safety matches under a 'self-denying ordinance.' Again, in her tribute to the efforts of Miss Nash at the Clifden Institute, Dallas characterizes individual work with the poor as a reassertion of hierarchical social arrangements.³² What is described – or imagined – by Dallas is a process of urban regeneration through a gendered epidemic of morality, emerging from its well-spring, the body of Nash.

²⁹ Dallas, p.184.

³⁰ Ibid, pp.186-188

³¹ Ibid, pp.187-190

³² Ibid, pp.189- 190.

Dallas sees Nash's womanly influence as at its most apparent in the realm of industrial relations. Employees were formerly 'rough and intractable' and given to 'constant little strikes'. Now, however, a 'change of feeling and tone has shown itself among the two hundred girls... [and] more or less passed on to the bulk of the employees'. Compliance, the reader is assured, has spread through Bow much as a taste for lawn tennis spread through Walter Besant's fictional Stepney Green. And it is all down to 'that personal influence which is so immeasurable and so powerful' which 'has bridged the distance which must exist between employer and employed.' Under this influence, Dallas notes, '[F]or the last three or four years none of the small strikes have occurred which were once so frequent. Mr Bartholomew [...] recognizes thoroughly how much the influence of the Institute improves the character of the workers.'³³ The potential castrators have been neutered.

Clearly, then, some shareholders and some feminists presented a picture of the ways in which the firm's practices registered across and within the bodies of the match women, which contrasted strongly with the alarming images offered by Annie Besant and the *Star* newspaper. While Millicent Fawcett was willing to admit instances of phosphorous necrosis on the part of the firm's 'servants', she traces its causes to the wilful and unhygienic working-class body. For Helen Dallas, the firm is busy establishing a close supervisory relationship with its 'servants' which minimizes the dangers, both of industrial disease, and cultural-political canker: voluntary philanthropy appears as viable facilitator of mass self-help.

If Dallas's article could be said to project a desire to regulate a disordered metropolis onto the figure of the match woman, the article to which I now turn takes

³³ Ibid, pp.190-1.

such projection to a vivid and revealing extreme. As the following discussion shows, by 1895 it was possible to repudiate the allegations of the *Star* by merging the social Romance of *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* with the colourful dreamspace offered to consumers by an expanding commodity culture. For an article in *The Girl's Own Paper* produces the match 'girl' in true phantasmagoric style, not as slum Medusa, but as a cleaned and moulded Galatea.

**REFORM AT BRYANT AND MAY EXHIBITED:
FROM CASTRATOR TO CINDERELLA IN *THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER***

Awareness of the intensive debate around female bodily danger in the marketplace informs this chapter's closing analysis of an article published in *The Girls Own Paper* in December 1895: a text which contests allegations of administrative and corporeal corruption at Bryant and May, while emphasizing the firm's role in forms of rescue from places of illicit pleasure and moral pollution. I show how the journalist Lloyd Lester romanticizes the workers and the space in which they toil by suggesting that the factory manufactures order and beauty. His article transforms matchwomen into living exhibits of social progress and moral-anatomical healing. Overall, Lester's piece in *The Girl's Own Paper* forges a narrative of bodily and spiritual reform delivered by Bryant and May, in the workplace and in the philanthropic drawing-room. Thus, although the article is a product of the burgeoning commodity culture of the 1890s, the writer effectively weaves a dream space of urban amelioration through reformed working practices and private charity analogous to that found in Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions*. Lester, like Walter Besant, mirrors elite desire by presenting the clean, intact female body as incarnation and pre-figuration of a benign subjugation of 'outcast' London.

The article ‘The Cinderellas of the National Household [...] A Visit to Bryant and May’s’ which appeared in *The Girls Own Paper* in December 1895, goes to great lengths to applaud Bryant and May’s advanced technology and concern for its workforce.³⁴ Whereas Annie Besant had in 1888 charged Bryant and May with practices destructive to the female labourer and to the social body, in Lloyd Lester’s representation, the spaces of work and leisure provided by a benign employer produce match women as aesthetic embodiments of social-industrial progress. As I shall discuss, Lester’s conceptualization of the technological discipline - the social reformation - provided by the match-making firm, is to a great degree the product of late-Victorian commodity culture and the particular means by which bodies were presented in exhibitionary environments as surfaces for the projection of desire and myth.

Scholars including Tony Bennett have suggested that the miscellaneous forms of public inspection which developed during the nineteenth century, including factory inspection, tourism, and excursions to commercial leisure zones, can be understood as intersecting with the development of institutions of confinement and surveillance.³⁵ When the public entered institutions and pleasure grounds featuring new modes of pedagogic and commercial display, such as museums, trade fairs, department stores and waxworks, they underwent voluntary, recreational exercises in self-surveillance. Pleasure-seekers at expositions and at increasingly elaborate fairgrounds were granted,

³⁴ *The Girls’ Own Paper* was published by the Religious Tract Society. The magazine was editorially pro-trade union but felt that girls were ‘safer’ in domestic service than in shops and factories. For context see Wendy Forrester, *Great-Grandmama’s Weekly: A Celebration of The Girl’s Own Paper, 1880-1901* (Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press, 1980), pp.28-41; Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls’ Culture in England, 1880-1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

³⁵ Tony Bennett ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’ *New Formations* 4 (1988), 73-102. In this important and suggestive essay, Bennet employs a Gramscian conception of the modern state’s educational role, and develops Foucault’s insights into the interrelations of knowledge and power.

from panoptical and panoramic vantage-points, totalizing visions of the ‘many-headed mob’ converted into an orderly public through participation in just such large-scale entertainments.³⁶

While the elite consumer zones of the early nineteenth century had offered light shows and optical illusions for the delight and edification of visitors, the newly-disciplined crowds flocking to centres of mass amusement were frequently entertained by developmental exhibitions of world, nation and empire: panoramic histories catering to a sense of ‘shared’ dominance, as the ‘eye of power’ was ‘made available to all’³⁷ This was, writes Bennett, ‘the Janus face of power’, evoked in both prison and the museum.³⁸ Indeed, he suggests that the exhibitionary complex, as it developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century, enabled an unending display of power/knowledge, which

manifested itself precisely in continually displaying its ability to command, order, and control objects and bodies, living or dead. [...] And this power marked out the distinction between the subjects and objects of power not within the national body but, as organized by the many rhetorics of imperialism, between that body and other, ‘non-civilized’ peoples upon whose bodies the effects of power were unleashed with as much force and theatricality as had been manifest on the scaffold.³⁹

The Janus face of Imperial London – a habitual dialectic of consumption and production, of dazzle and darkness – is invoked at the beginning of Lloyd Lester’s article, as the narrator takes the reader, as if on a whim, from the attractions of the West End, to the East End. Lester, a male journalist writing for a Christian publication, represents his journey across the city in terms of high-minded social duty rather than as an exercise in voyeurism; yet his article, written for a new form of print media

³⁶ Ibid, p. 85.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 96.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 96.

³⁹ Ibid 79-80.

marketed to young females, presents philanthropic interest as a form of pleasurable urban spectatorship. The West End with its phantasmagoric cultures might be commonly understood at the close of the nineteenth century 'through opposition to other areas of the city, especially the East End'.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Lester's movement from West to East bridges the delights of consumerism available to comfortably-off readers should they visit Regent Street, to those available at Bow - site of mass production. For Lester relates an omnibus-voyage into a dazzling human showcase of amelioration.

Before describing his arrival at Bow, Lester delineates an alien being called 'the Match Girl' with which he occupies his mind during his speedy journey eastwards. As Judith Walkowitz has shown, match women, no less than female philanthropists and lady shoppers, became prominent in imaginative mappings of the fin-de-siècle metropolis following the 1888 strike. In his awareness of the ways in which the matchwomen stand as emblem of female labour in the metropolis, Lester is informed by depictions of the matchwomen's industrial victory: 'The white-aproned, dauntless damsel, with her sweeping feathers, and 'fringe', worn Skye terrier fashion [...] certainly occupies the leading position in the very front rank of East End toilers.'⁴¹ In keeping with widely-circulating depictions, Lester imagines the 'match girl' as embodiment of an assertive urban femininity, marked by labour, and curiously adorned. And, in common with Annie Besant's series of representations, Lester's imaginings crystallize the tension between vulnerability and threat commonly inscribed upon the impoverished and unregulated female body. For the factory 'girl' as

⁴⁰ Quote is from Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, p. 7. For the female coding of mass culture, see also Bowlby *Just Looking* pp.66-82; Ledger *New Woman*, pp.177-198.

⁴¹ Lester, p. 147. For similar imagery of girls working for Bryant and May, see for example 'Sketches at Bryant and May's Match Factory', *The Illustrated London News* 4th August 1888, p. 124; Walker *Sketches*, p. 126.

described is a figure simultaneously plucky, pathetic *and* fraught with menace.⁴² Her wretched form literally embodies a potential for social unrest – for attack upon the body politic – through its unwomanly combination of defiance, strength and mobility.

Unsurprisingly, Lester articulates this sense of danger by attending to the match women's potential to move as a political force from East to West. Lester may move unproblematically from Piccadilly to Bow on his own social mission, but the matchwomen's journeys westward are construed as occasions for alarm. Writing in 1895, Lester declares that the matchwomen's protest against the tax strategy of Gladstone's first ministry – a march on Westminster in 1871, when Lester was a child – had frightened him.⁴³ He had imagined the women, he tells us, as 'strange and sad' and, simultaneously, as 'very horrid, rough girls indeed.' Their march had seemed to him the harbinger of an English Revolutionary terror.⁴⁴

However, Lester's article raises the spectre of the revolutionary female-decapitator only to assure his readers that Bryant and May, Limited, is now a major player in the delivery of social cure. In a reassuring contrast with the unnerving figure of the New Woman, it is the 'dauntless damsel,' rather than Bryant and May, who has been neutered and set right as a result of the famous strike. Lester begins to spin this soothing fantasy of 'the Match Girl' as he describes how, having been greeted by 'a neat bonny maid-servant', he is taken on a tour of Bryant and May's factory on Fairfield Road. His guide is Gilbert Bartholomew, the managing director, who tells him that "'We are always pleased to show our girls to anyone who takes a true interest in them.'" As his account of the factory and its practices unfolds, Lester is wholly

⁴² In chapters seven and eight of this thesis I address literal slum pregnancy and abortion in the context of perceived biological and social menace presented by the female pauper body.

⁴³ See Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1988), pp. 193-198; Beer, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁴ Lester, p. 147.

positive: even the all-male space of the dipping rooms, where the risk of contracting phosphorous necrosis was at its highest, Lester describes as ‘delightfully cool and airy’. When Bartholomew takes Lester to a gallery for a ‘bird’s-eye view’ of the boxing-room, the panoptical vista is described as a ‘pretty scene’ in which elements of the factory, the women’s bodies, their coloured blouses, merge into a sensuous composition.⁴⁵

Although the general manager complains of bad timekeeping and overexcitement on the part of the workforce (““They are so uncontrolled””), evoking an alternative, disordered vision, Lester ‘sees’ only ‘bonnie’ girls, ‘sonsie lassies’ with ‘bright faces’ who sing with voices ‘rich, full and sweet’, who work contentedly in a ‘marvellous’ factory making ‘pretty wax vestas’. His view of the working environment and the ‘light’ness of its mechanized duties prompts Lester to ‘realise’ something. It is the women’s ‘home influences’ rather than inescapable poverty that cause their ‘[W]ild, independent, alas! often reckless nature to develop such deplorable disregard of womanly characteristics.’ Exposure to Bryant and May’s industrial regime, however, has transformed the ‘reckless’ and unwomanly slum-woman into the ‘bonny lass,’ antithesis of the revolutionary rough.⁴⁶

The tropes deployed by Lester in eulogizing Bryant and May tell us much about the framework within which he understands what it is that he is being shown; for he defines a site of industrial production, a focus of controversy over female bodily danger, in terms of scientific and social progress - and of *enchantment*. The text portrays the match factory as an ‘enchanted Palace,’ and expresses wonder at sights ‘fascinating enough for a fairy tale; one of those magic stories which science and

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 147-8.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 148.

invention make possible'.⁴⁷ These striking conceptualizations can help us to think through the connections between commodity culture, industrialized labour and philanthropic endeavour which are implied by Lester's article, and the way in which the matchwomen function as passive wish-images, rebutting the grotesque body of the victim of phosphorous necrosis and incarnating a cleansed and compliant East End.

As has been well rehearsed by cultural historians, the original world fair, the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851, was commonly characterized in terms of fantasy, of fairytale. Uniting machinery, military technologies, manufactured goods, artworks and mass refreshment facilities in an overwhelming spectacle of plenitude, this and subsequent expositions have been analysed in terms of a myth-making harmful to working-class interests: 'A phantasmagoria of politics had its source in the world expositions no less than a phantasmagoria of merchandise [...] The message of the world exhibitions as fairylands was the promise of social progress for the masses without revolution.'⁴⁸ In intimating that Bryant and May are engaged in countering social and bodily danger by manufacturing a happy, disciplined workforce, Lester puts the Bow factory to work as social-political phantasmagoria. In countering representations of the infected female labourer and the revolutionary gorgon, moreover, Lester is informed by the evolutionary sequences and visual practices which configured popular commercial and scientific displays of human beings in the late-Victorian city.

Peopled exhibits, which were staged across Europe, America and the colonies in increasing numbers from the 1870s onward, manifested the dynamic interconnections between projects of commercial and imperialist propaganda, public

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 148.

⁴⁸ Buck-Morss *Dialectics*, p. 86.

education, show-business, and scientific endeavour. Such displays had much in common, not only with old-fashioned ‘freak’ shows, but with emerging disciplinary practices such as asylums, and the display of the corpses and the body parts of racial and criminal ‘types’, by anthropologists.⁴⁹ The variety of displayed ‘objects’, exhibitionary environments and associated narratives, the countless ways in which such spectacles might be consumed and interpreted from multiple social and geographical perspectives, and the diverse modes of resistance enacted by living exhibitionary ‘relics’, have been increasingly acknowledged and explored by scholars over the last decade or so.⁵⁰ In referring to this range of exhibitive phenomena, it is not my intention to offer an unsubtle, totalizing account. Rather, I seek to develop our understanding of Lester’s article, and the sexual and social desires which it represents, in terms of the display of ‘other’ bodies.

Gilbert Bartholomew’s assertion that “‘We are always pleased to show our girls to anyone who takes a true interest in them.” reminds us that the principle of public examination of labour processes extended beyond factory and sanitary inspection to forms of commercial exhibition and tourism.⁵¹ Janice Helland has investigated the activities of organizations such as the Donegal Industrial Fund, and the presentation in English and Scottish cities of elaborate theatres of ‘domestic’ display featuring Irish craftswomen. Aristocratic philanthropists, craft organisations

⁴⁹ Paul Greenhalgh *Ephemeral Vistas: A History of Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World’s Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 82-88; Robert W. Rydell *All the World’s A Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), pp. 64-5.

⁵⁰ Ewan Johnston, ‘Reinventing Fiji at nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century exhibitions’ in *The Journal of Pacific History* 40 (2005), 23-44; Ruth B. Williams, ‘Performing the Native Woman: Primitivism and Mimicry in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture’ in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* ed. by Lynda Jessup (Toronto, Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 26-49; Saloni Mathur, ‘Living Ethnographical Exhibits: The Case of 1886’, *Cultural Anthropology* 15 (2000), 492-524; Peter H. Hoffenberg, ‘Nothing Very New or Very Showy to Exhibit?’: Australia at the Great Exhibition and After’, pp.93-120 in *Britain, the Empire, and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851*, ed. by Jeffrey A. Auerback and Peter H. Hoffenberg (Aldershot: Ashgate 2008), pp.93-120.

⁵¹ Bennett: 78-9.

and entrepreneurs were involved in the promotion of these exhibitions, which combined customary practices of rural charity with a genuine interest in aesthetics - and in questions of Irish cultural and national identity. The craft-women functioned as romanticized spectacles of the rural, and of wholesome and skilled production, in faux interiors or villages at assorted exhibition spaces: the production of goods by living exhibits in mock-ups of their habitus conferred a sense of authenticity on the objects produced.⁵²

The exoticization of the 'living exhibit', then, might be applied to impoverished white European peoples, not least to Irish people, who were often interpreted as a liminal race, as racially Other embodiments of European 'barbarism' – and who were numerous among the match women of Bryant and May.⁵³ And while such exhibitions intervened in discourses around the contested area of women's work, a more sensational contribution to public debate was made by the exhibition of sweated industries, held in 1906 at the Queen's Hall, a prominent West End concert venue situated on Langham Place, just north of Oxford Street. Sponsored by the Liberal *Daily News*, the event was intended to arouse public opinion and pressure the government into protecting those unprotected by existing factory legislation, toiling in workshops and in their own homes.⁵⁴ The exhibition formed, as Sheila Blackburn suggests, 'a living tableau of wretchedness'. Its illustrated handbook expresses an eagerness to eradicate the 'poisonous creeper' attacking the social body by revealing 'the drawn grey faces of women, faces that have never laughed, the faces of children

⁵² Janice Helland, 'Working Bodies, Celtic Textiles and the Donegal Industrial Fund 1883-1890' *Textile* 2 (2004), 134-155, and 'Rural Women and Urban Extravagance in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain' *Rural History: Economy, Society, Culture* 13 (2002), 179-197. For faux environments more broadly, see Greenhalgh, pp. 83-105; Rydell, pp. 61-66.

⁵³ McClintock, p.53; C.Mills *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1997), pp. 79-81.

⁵⁴ Helland 'Rural'; *Sweated Industries: Being a Handbook of the 'Daily News' Exhibition*, ed. by Richard Mudie-Smith (London and Tonbridge: Bradbury, Agnew & Co., 1906); Blackburn, 'To Be Poor.' For the venue, see Robert Elkin *Queen's Hall, 1893-1941* (London: Rider & Co., 1944).

with sad eyes and flat cheeks and little shrunken figures’ – the modern gothic forms which ‘hover dimly’ behind printed data on starvation wages.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, if the organizers of such events were informed by a growing recognition of the potential benefits of public display, the presentation in a range of commercial spaces of a notional version of India (pre-eminent among Britain’s overseas ‘possessions’) can be read as chiming closely with the idealization of the figure of the medieval craftsman characteristic of the arts and crafts movement. Associated publicity commonly delivered a nostalgic image of India as unchanging pre-Industrial community defined by intimate, village-based social relations; the events offered consumers images of ‘simpler’ peoples at work.⁵⁶ Thus impoverished and subject bodies were consistently, if variously, construed through the lens of their relation to the industrial. The sweated home-worker might be represented as excluded from the rationalized and sanitary environment of the factory. The ‘Indian’ might embody a purity and harmony in the realms of the aesthetic and the social, but a lack of capitalist technological organization was commonly interpreted as marker of inferior social and/or evolutionary development. A refined, ‘timeless’ culture was measured, as were the ‘anachronistic’ cultures of Africa, in relation to dynamic western civilization.⁵⁷

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the rhetoric of improvement shifted gradually from the classification of stages of manufacture on to the

⁵⁵ Richard Mudie-Smith ‘Introductory Note’ in *Sweated*, ed. by Richard Mudie Smith; H.W. Smith ‘The German Home-Work Exhibition, Berlin, 1906’, in *ibid*, p. 18; Blackburn ‘To Be Poor’, pp.251-253. While some socialist commentators objected to working-class women being displayed as embodiments of urban degeneration before the gaze of privileged consumers, the impact of the exhibition can be traced in the institution of wage boards – for home, workshop and factory workers – in 1909. Blackburn, pp. 251-253.

⁵⁶ Mathur ‘Ethnological’: 496.

⁵⁷ Paul Young *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: the Victorian New World Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009); Mathur, pp. 496-8.

classification of civilizations and races: to diminish peoples to exhibitions of 'primitive' customs and crafts was to position 'their preferred audiences at the very pinnacle of the exhibitionary order of things they constructed.'⁵⁸ Consumers of colourful industrial spectacle were informed that the market economy and its attendant technologies incarnated history-as-progress, and would ameliorate and uplift the peoples of the Empire. However, these benign universalist narratives co-existed with pseudo-scientific estimations of many non-European racial 'types' as irretrievably inferior.⁵⁹ As the previous chapters have indicated, complex, interactive notions of genetic, cultural and sexual deviancy were projected onto non-European bodies, and onto lower-class and female bodies of European peoples.⁶⁰

As fetishes of regression and reform, the exhibited bodies of subject peoples appear, by and large, to have served to smooth over social contradictions and to reflect commercial-Imperial desire on the part of large sections of the public. What I am arguing here is that, in a sense, myth was written across the flesh and bone of the displayed body no less than across the reflective surfaces of the modern city - and likewise played a role in obfuscating class relations. As Anne McClintock writes, 'At the exhibition, white British workers could feel included in the imperial national, the voyeuristic spectacle of racial 'superiority' compensating them for their class subordination.'⁶¹ Displayed bodies were screens for the projection of desire.

Lester's article is imbued with the principles of mass spectacle and bodily display. Having toured the factory floor, he ascends to a viewing gallery from which he is able to integrate consumption and surveillance. Assuming the specular and

⁵⁸ Bennett 'Exhibitionary', p. 95

⁵⁹ Young, *Globalization*.

⁶⁰ Gilman 'Black Bodies'; Corbey, p. 354; Bennett, pp. 90-92.

⁶¹ McClintock, p. 59.

cognitive authority of a thrilled spectator surveying the exhibitionary spaces at a world fair, he reads the floor of the 'fairy palace' as panorama of human progress, achieved by bringing working-class women into sustained contact with the 'magic' of highly-developed technologies. The objects and beneficiaries of disciplinary labour present an antiseptic radiance appropriate to an Imperial race and allied to ideal bourgeois forms of femininity - while paradoxically remaining (as vigorous, labouring females), displayed, exoticized, other.

To grasp this fully, it is necessary to set the figures concocted by Lester in the context of the high-profile allegations of the *Star*, while bearing in mind the degenerative associations of physiognomic destruction. While early racial theorists evaluated the ways in which non-white bodies and skulls deviated from the contours of Classical sculpture, the nineteenth century saw multiple confluences of the physiognomies of the lower classes and the prostitute - not least those damaged by disease - with evolutionary incompleteness.⁶² In this cultural context, Annie Besant and the *Star* represented the tyrannized victims of industrialism as a series of diseased and porous grotesques. Such figures, concealed from public view, and contrasting with the canonical forms of white male antiquity, served as visible signs of decay, and as emblem of the horrors camouflaged by, and within, the unstable human body and the dazzling, labyrinthine city. They summoned up, in multiple ways, the horrors of prostitution, primitivism, and social disintegration.⁶³

To counter these sensational images of toxicity and deceit, therefore, Lester describes a factory which is open to scrutiny by 'anyone who takes a true interest'. In

⁶² Nancy Stepan *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*, pp. 12-15; Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, London: Norton, 1981); George W. Stocking Jr., 'The Turn-of-the-Century Concept of Race', *Modernism/Modernity* 1 (1994), 4-16.

⁶³ Reay, pp. 51-58.

ways reminiscent of the transparency and ‘surveyability’ ascribed to commercial–scientific panoramas, Bryant and May’s processes, and those of the human body, are conceived as readily apparent through cursory inspection.⁶⁴ Publicly-accessible organic surfaces are subjected to a confident exterior reading: skin and bone, observed while engaged in labour, serves as index of interior health, and of the health of the city. Lester presents the match women as forms which are stabilized, cleansed and rendered canonical through the intervention of Bryant and May.

In common with those encountering assemblages of bodies, artefacts and technologies at expositions, then, Lester interprets the display as corporeal signifier of progress. That is to say, having discussed in some detail the violence and volatility displayed by the matchwomen in 1871, he projects a narrative of linear progress onto the bodies he sees in the factory of 1895. The beauty and docility of the labourers indicate social amelioration, but this sculpting of womanly flesh further suggests evolutionary progress in the sense that images of regressive disfigurement are precisely reversed.

Lester’s text is a salutary reminder that during the 1890s, despite the popular impact of pessimistic representations of slum femininity by writers of fiction such as Arthur Morrison and Somerset Maugham, positive discourses circulated in which industrialism and private charity effectively civilized the slum female, and manufactured urban improvement. Far from degenerating, whether working on the factory floor towards ‘promotion’ or practising their music drill at the Clifden Institute, the match women are figured by Lester as moving forward within an individuated, developmental narrative; or, to quote Foucault, ‘The disciplinary methods reveal a

⁶⁴ Corbey, pp. 361.

linear time whose moments are integrated, one upon another, and which is orientated towards a terminal, stable point; in short, an 'evolutive' time.'⁶⁵

This reading of Lester's article in the context of lavish national and imperial expositions can be enriched by reference to Martin Danahay's discussion of the projection of the Pygmalion myth onto the female body by artists and writers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶⁶ Dahanay is interested in the projection of contrasting images of womanhood, consistent with a split in male subjectivity, onto 'real' women. He points to an 'idealized representation that bespeaks the artist's desire as much as the actual appearance of his subject' – an image in concordance with an exemplary middle-class femininity, and consistently linked to the mythical figure of Galatea – and defined by her evil twin, the 'dangerously sexual, threatening Medusa' into which the chaste woman may be transformed by narcissism, that is, by uncontained sexuality.⁶⁷

The myth of the sculpted paragon made flesh (commonly referred to as Galatea in modern era reworkings) is registered in Victorian narratives of the lower-class woman who is (or who cannot be) moulded by her elite suitor into an ideal of bourgeois femininity.⁶⁸ In Lester's 'fairytale', as in Walter Besant's 'impossible story', the concerned employer's strategies mould a romantic or pre-industrial maidenhood to the contours of elite desire. 'Light' tasks, involving 'pretty match vestas,' seem as appropriate to delicate feminine fingers as dressmaking. In this vein,

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 160; Lester, pp. 148-149.

⁶⁶ Martin A. Danahay, 'Mirrors of Masculine Desire: Narcissism and Pygmalion in Victorian Representation' *Victorian Poetry* 32 (1994), 35-53. In the ancient Mediterranean myth, the craftsman Pygmalion, repulsed by the prostitutional women who surround him, creates a statue, the very model of beautiful and appropriate womanhood, who comes to life.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41- 48.

⁶⁸ Obviously this paradigm is common to texts discussed in the course of this thesis.

the very prettiness of the pink and red vestas, and their commercial packaging - boxes glowing in an array of gem-like colours – call to mind Walter Benjamin’s insight into the relations between nineteenth-century technical-mercantile innovation and imagery of the archaic: industrial novelty habitually utilizing images of the Utopian, of unfulfilled myth.⁶⁹ Lester’s phantasmagoric versions of olde worlde womanhood function as sheaths to obscure images of bodily disease, while the matches’ enchanting cartons obscure their conditions of production.

Presently Lester leaves this ‘enchanted palace’ and crosses to the Clifden Institute, where he meets the superintendent, Miss Nash, in a domestic interior of ‘peaceful tone’.⁷⁰ As the representation of the Institute and of the religiously-inflected work of Nash proceeds, the domesticating, privatising drive is clear. Lester praises the restaurant for its role in winning the girls away from ‘the rough life of their class’: he describes the horrors of vulgarity and intoxication, the ‘untaught crude fancies’ (including the frequenting of music halls) of those match girls ‘as yet unreached by refined womanly influence’.⁷¹ Nash’s efforts are sanctified: ‘[S]uch devoted labours as [...] God’s heroines are engaged in, that tell upon the general good of society, helping these dear working sisters of ours to higher ideals, and true gracious womanhood.’⁷² The problem lies squarely with the girls’ home lives and choice of leisure activity, rather than with poorly-paid, exhausting and unhealthy factory work. Clearly, this portrayal of the inculcation of home-loving and ‘feminine’ characteristics continues Lester’s challenge to discourses in which industrial labour, and thus Bryant and May,

⁶⁹ As Robert Opie’s collection of Victorian match boxes shows, at the fin de siècle matches and cigarettes came in dazzling packaging as likely to feature pictures of cavaliers and rural idylls as well as sailors, soldiers, showgirls and bathing belles: see Robert Opie *The Victorian Scrapbook* (London: New Cavendish, 2003), p. 24.

⁷⁰ Lester, p. 149.

⁷¹ Lester, p. 149.

⁷² Ibid, p. 149. The teleological ordering of living exhibits in museums and phantasmagoric zones, it has been suggested, reproduced ‘the well-known plots of civilized/Christian writers bringing light to the savage/heathen in the name of some higher instance.’ Corbey, p. 359.

‘unsex’ women and undermine their capacity to perform their proper marital and maternal duties.⁷³

As I shall show, for writers such as George Gissing and Arthur Morrison the caress of the working-class male, in concert with urban aesthetics, exercises a contaminating influence on impoverished women. Slum marriages result in female bodies agape through poisonous urban reproduction. In contrast, Lester’s text celebrates the successful preparation of impoverished women for marriage and motherhood through Angela Messenger-esque supervision. This acculturation equips the female labourer to consume responsibly and to resist the lures of the city’s tainted finery.

Ultimately, however, the trauma suffered by the exploited bodies of industrialism were disclosed to the public: seepage and rot surfaced to stain the phantasmagoric surfaces and smooth narratives generated by Bruce-Joy and Lester. In the closing weeks of 1898, following further investigations by the *Star*, Gilbert Bartholomew pleaded guilty at Worship Street police court on Bryant and May’s behalf to violation of and non-compliance with the Factory Acts. While the firm had made its factory a commercial showcase, exhibiting healthier members of its workforce to sympathetic journalists, concealment of cases of phosphorus necrosis from the inspectorate had been achieved by the bribery and financial intimidation of vulnerable workers and their families.⁷⁴ The result of this intimidation had been silence and confinement: those affected were enclosed in their own homes, pressured into consulting only those physicians provided by Bryant and May. The cause of death of

⁷³ See Carolyn Malone, ‘Gendered Discourses and the Making of Protective Labour Legislation in England, 1830-1914’, *Journal of British Studies* 37 (1998), 166-191; Malone, ‘Sensational Stories.’

⁷⁴ Satre, pp. 23-25.

one employee (a male, who had worked in the dipping rooms) was wrongly certified by the company doctors.⁷⁵ For an instant, then, through these revelations, the matches were re-inscribed with the processes of their production. As the pedestal supporting Gladstone's monumental body was spattered in blood, as Gladstone's hands would be stained red, so Lester's narrative proved to be - full of holes.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 20-24: some female sufferers had been working in the boxing room.

Chapter four

WHAT LIES BENEATH:

THE SUSPECT FEMALE BODY IN THE BOOTH ARCHIVE

On 19th May 1897, Arthur Lionel Baxter attended the Clifden Institute, where he interviewed the superintendent, Miss Nash, and made a detailed entry in his notebook. Then thirty-seven years old, and hailing from a privileged social background, Baxter had trained as a barrister - but it was not in this capacity that he visited Bow. For following his legal training, Baxter had started work as an investigator for Charles Booth's groundbreaking sociological study *Life and Labour of the People in London*. In 1894 he had entered the cab-owning business with a working-class business partner, apparently as a result of his social-scientific work.¹

In this discussion, I treat the hand-written accounts made by Baxter of his visits to the Clifden Institute and to The Welcome, a philanthropic enterprise serving women factory workers in an adjacent district of East London, as cultural texts in which the notions of hygiene, wholesomeness and radiant womanly authority are key to conceptualizing the operation of the institutes such as Clifden House are disrupted. This chapter develops insights already gained in the course of this thesis, to analyse the notebook reports in which the Clifden Institute and The Welcome, East End clubs for female factory workers. It approaches from a fresh perspective the dialectic between the intact and nourishing woman and the grotesque and contaminating slum female which is central to a range of fin-de-siècle discourses of the urban. It explores the ways in which the conduct of an elite female evokes notions of bodily and urban taint. In so

¹ O'Day and Englander, pp.108-115.

doing, this discussion highlights the precarious position of the morally ‘influential’ woman who, no less than the female social investigator, is ‘Associated by gender with the very emblems of poverty, disease, and fallenness in urban panoramas created by novelists and social reformers.’²

The Booth associates working to produce material for Booth’s Religious Influences series (investigations started 1897; resultant volumes, constituting final seven volumes of *Life and Labour*, published 1902-3) interviewed a variety of social actors including ministers, employers and philanthropists. The associates incorporated printed material connected with those institutions into the notebooks in which they wrote reports of the interviews. The Religious Influences series has attracted little attention from scholars by comparison with the Poverty series: there has been apparent confusion about Booth’s motivation for undertaking this part of the survey, doubts about the efficiency of the methodology employed, and a related mistrust of both the archival and printed material.³

Those investigative methods Booth was using when these notebook reports were produced, reflected a belief that it was possible to off-set bias by applying ‘common sense’ to the analysis of a range of complementary data, in combination with information gathered through mass interview. Mass interview would supply quantitative data, while personal observation could produce the qualitative data

² Nord, *Walking*, p.12.

³ The Charles Booth Archive at the Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science consists mainly of notebooks of interviews; also books of observations made during a series of chaperoned walks with the police. See David Englander and Rosemary O’Day, *The Streets of London: The Booth Notebooks – South East* (London: Deptford Forum Publishing, 1997). For past inaccessibility, see O’Day and Englander, p. 21. Content summaries and digitized images are now available, re-catalogued, as the Charles Booth Online Archive.

essential for ‘correct’ enumeration.⁴ Yet personal observation was recorded as a ‘thumbnail’ character sketch, in which the physical characteristics of the interviewee were used as index of character and ability. This practice informed Booth and others reading the report, as well as aiding the recollection of the interviewer.⁵

I am not the first scholar to consider these character sketches in terms of their potential importance to cultural studies and women's history.⁶ Thomas R. C. Brydon, for example, has studied the archives and printed volumes to argue that the Religious Influences survey functioned as an audit of the charity control in the metropolis, virtue being conceived in terms of economic self-reliance, and that underlying hostility to religious doles resulted in Booth ‘cooking the books’ with the evidence gathered.⁷ Overall, as one Booth expert observes, ‘[The Booth notebooks] are at least as interesting for what they reveal about the views of Booth and his collaborators as for what they reveal about the views of working-class Londoners.’⁸

This chapter, in making a claim for the adaptability of this archival material to cultural-historical case study as well as to large-scale statistical study, outlines briefly the circumstances in which the thumbnail character sketches were produced. It then

⁴ O'Day and Englander, pp.191-2; David Englander and Rosemary O'Day, ‘Introduction’, in *Retrieved Riches*, ed. by David Englander and Rosemary O'Day, pp.1-46 (pp. 34-35); Thomas R. C. Brydon, ‘Charles Booth, Charity Control, and the London Churches, 1897-1903’, *The Historian*, 68 (2006), 489-518 (pp.512-514).

⁵ O'Day and Englander, pp.167-8; Rosemary O'Day, ‘Interviews and Investigations: Charles Booth and the making of the Religious Influences Survey’ in *Retrieved Riches* ed. by David Englander and Rosemary O'Day pp.143-163; Rosemary O'Day, ‘The Men From the Ministry’ in *Religion in Victorian Britain, II: Controversies*, ed. by Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press; Open University, 1988), pp.258-79.

⁶ O'Day ‘Interviews’, pp. 156-157; Rosemary O'Day ‘Women and Social Investigation: Clara Collet and Beatrice Potter’ in *Retrieved Riches*, ed. by David Englander and Rosemary O'Day, pp. 165-200 (p.339).

⁷ Brydon, pp. 495-514. See also O'Day and Englander, pp.165-172.

⁸ Hugh McLeod ‘Working-class religion in late Victorian London: Booth’s ‘Religious Influences’ revisited’ in *Retrieved Riches* ed. by David Englander and Rosemary O'Day, pp. 265-288 (p 271). McLeod suggests ways in which, the evidence in the notebooks could contribute towards penetrating working-class and comparative faith histories, *ibid.* pp. 275-282. See also Brydon, p.509.

examines the presence of images of feminine cleanliness and stain in the texts, and the ways in which the inappropriately consuming and grotesque feminine haunts the 'cultured' female body in the city, as well as impoverished needlewoman and the female labourer. It focuses on incidents which bring into play those deep-rooted metonymic associations between dirt, 'inferior' bodies, immorality and loss of boundaries, and highlights the strategy adopted by a lady philanthropist to define her own moral and corporeal wholesomeness against that of a despised neighbour. Tellingly, this strategy rests on delineating that neighbour's improper mobility and consumerism - her destructive ingestion of the street cultures of impoverished women.

**THE THUMBNAIL OF EVALUATION:
THE BOOTH SURVEY AND THE CHARACTER SKETCH**

The agnostic Booth tells us that religion 'claims the chief part' of the 'other social influences which form part of the very structure of life'. In undertaking his survey of religious influences on the population of London, he was interested in the provision by religious institutions of regulatory impact.⁹ Thus the survey assessed practical social achievements, and its investigators downplayed the narrowly 'religious' in the projects of those they interviewed.¹⁰ Parishes and missions were assessed primarily in terms of their promotion of social stability, for example by countering sexual immorality and violent conduct, rather than in terms of 'spiritual' or doctrinal issues.

From 1897, a socially advantaged, all-male team of Booth associates fanned out across a London divided into districts drawn in accordance with urban, rather than

⁹ *Life and Labour of the People in London Third Series: Religious Influences* ed. by Charles Booth (London: Macmillan, 1902), I.

¹⁰ O'Day 'Interviews', p. 143; O'Day and Englander, pp. 164-5.

religious, considerations.¹¹ Booth's investigators questioned clergymen and ministers from across denominations, and others believed to exercise, or have insight into, religious and moral influences upon the population.¹² Although those interviewed for the survey were overwhelmingly male, there were among the informants a number of women, from diverse backgrounds, engaged on a variety of social missions. Prior to the arrival of a member of Booth's team, the informant was provided with a printed Schedule of questions. The Schedules were designed as if for comparative purposes: the questions relate to the extent of local involvement in church activities rather than any sophisticated assessment of 'spiritual' impact.¹³ During interview, the Schedule might be set aside, according to its perceived utility. The notes made by Booth associates at the time of these interviews merge the responses to these questions with the thumbnail sketch.

The use of the thumbnail sketch can be related to the complementary and corroborating relationship between texts of fiction and 'reality' as understood during the nineteenth century.¹⁴ As Ruth Livesey has shown, the process of 'reading for character' by philanthropic case workers was associated with an imputation of responsibility for poverty to the individual.¹⁵ Livesey notes that Charles Booth had praised Gissing's novel *Demos* as a potential tool in learning about the lives of the poor; Clara Collet praised the novels of George Gissing in public lectures and in the

¹¹ Charles Booth and others, eds., *Life and Labour of the People in London, Third Series: Religious Influences*, 7 volumes (London: Macmillan, 1902), I, pp.5-6; O'Day and Englander, pp. 109-118; O'Day, 'Interviews', p.146. Clara Collet and Beatrice Webb contributed only to Booth's earlier Poverty Survey. The associates for the Religious Influences were: Ernest Aves, George Arkell, Jesse Argyle, A.L. Baxter and George Duckworth. O'Day and Englander, p. 166; Englander and O'Day, 'Introduction', pp. 27-3.

¹² Booth's attempts to interview 'the people' for this survey failed. See O'Day and Englander, p. 191.

¹³ See O'Day 'Interviews', pp. 149-60.

¹⁴ See for example V. Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts and History* (Oxford 1994).

¹⁵ Ruth Livesey, 'Reading for Character: Women Social Reformers and Narratives of the Urban Poor in Late Victorian and Edwardian London', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9 (2004), pp. 43-67

pages of the *Charity Organisation Review*.¹⁶ This was because ‘the rise of character as the causal factor in social explanation in the late nineteenth century [...] made the narrative mode of Gissing’s naturalism an indispensable formal vehicle for social investigators.’¹⁷

Though notions of individual moral failing, heredity and environment merged in the approaches taken by a range of social workers and commentators at this time, the Charity Organization Society (C.O.S.) placed the overwhelming responsibility for poverty on the deficient moral character of poor people. The organisation’s methods of assessment involved ‘reading’ the bodies of the poor for signs of decency or fecklessness during interview, with caseworkers trained to ‘think of their role as authors of the characters of the poor’.¹⁸ Thus difference in ‘scientific’ status between the face-to-face casework undertaken by the C.O.S. and the blend of statistical analysis and personal observation practised by Booth – this ‘triumph of personal observation in a statistical framework’ - could be interpreted as one of scale and context.¹⁹

The recent scholarly reconnection of slum fiction with the social-investigatory reading of character is helpful to the tracing of naturalism's gothic which comprises an important element of this thesis, particularly of its second section. In this chapter, I use the lens of the evaluative character sketch to explore the ways in which the bodies of

¹⁶ Deborah McDonald, *Clara Collet: An Educated Working Woman* (London: Woburn Press, 2004); Livesey, 'Reading'.

¹⁷ Livesey, 'Reading', pp. 45- 47; Ellen Ross 'Hungry Children: Housewives and London Charity, 1870-1918' in *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, ed. by Peter Mandler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 161-196 (p.173).

¹⁸ Livesey, 'Reading', p.54; Mort, pp. 133-136; Harris, 'Between Civic Virtue'; Charles Loch Mowat: *The Charity Organisation Society 1869-1913; Its Ideas and Work* (London: Methuen & Co. 1961). For a more positive account of C.O.S. casework see Helen Bosanquet, *Social Work in London 1869 to 1912: A History of the Charity Organisation Society* (London: James Murray, 1914).

¹⁹ Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, 2nd edn (London: Longmans, 1946), pp.195-6; see also José Harris, 'The Webbs, the COS and the Ratan Tata Foundation: Social Policy from the Perspective of 1912' in *The Goals of Social Policy*, ed. by M. Bulmer, J. Lewis and D. Piachaud (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.27-63.

women managing clubs catering to factory workers are imaginatively linked to the institutions which they run, and to the bodies of the female labourers for whose aid and reformation they toil. In the case of the notes made of the Booth associates' encounters with Miss Price, manager of The Welcome on the Isle of Dogs, the investigators' notes touch upon what lurks behind the exhibition of training and restraint. The following discussion teases out apprehension that the wholesome appearance of the philanthropic woman masks an unstable, regressive body, itself vulnerable to the absorption and transmission of urban stain – of corrupting city cultures.

‘LIGHT, CLEAN AND CHEERFUL’:

A.L. BAXTER WRITES THE CLIFDEN INSTITUTE

Baxter's account of his visit to the Clifden Institute in May 1897 chronicles its successes in terms which chime suggestively with that written by Helen Dallas for the *Economic Review*, and with the sparkling medical-moral concoctions produced by Lloyd Lester for the *Girl's Own Paper* (see previous chapter). The result of contact with a relatively cultured woman operating in a centre, financed by an employer, providing nutrition, comfort and discipline, is moral permeation: penetration, infestation. As in Walter Besant's Stepney Green, exposure to the physical presence and personal influence of a higher class of woman produces a dynamic and influential 'set' of moral agents:

At first it [the Institute] was regarded by the firm with indifference, if not with hostility, but now “they cannot do enough for us”; when the work first began relations between the girls and the firm were as bad as possible [...] small strikes on the most trivial matters were a constant occurrence. The girls were a terribly rough lot and decent people scarcely dared go down the street when they were coming out of work. Now this is all altered: the girls have become tractable, decent, and quiet in their dress and behaviour; their relations with the firm are excellent, and the firm recognise that the influence of the girls who

attend the Institute, from 300 to 400 in number, has permeated throughout the whole of their female employés.²⁰

Indeed, Baxter's assessment - a short text - brings into quick association those insistent cultural tropes of the open, tainted body of noise and desire, defined against the nurturing and nurtured body, its orifices firmly closed. The factory women prior to sartorial reform are associated with the public street, and with imagery evoking the anachronistic and feminized mob of crowd theory. The 'decent' person is vulnerable to the massed streetwalking threat of the female 'rough'. The 'loud' and open body is connected to ill-spent leisure, and to social and industrial disorder. The signification of submissiveness to 'quiet' dress, the improvement of the 'girls', as in the report by Dallas, is linked to docility in the workplace, where 'small strikes' no longer occur: matter back in place. Whatever the perceived virtues of the New Unionism, the text links female assertion to deviancy.

Central to the discussion which follows is a paradigm of positive cultural transmission from the woman managing the club, which counters the seductions and degradations of the street. This narrative is as central to the Institute's Annual Report, which Baxter attached to his notes, as it is to Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*. In the Report, the club is depicted as an intimate and stratified society where the threat posed by social dissolution – the alienation of rich from poor, employer from employee – is addressed by feminine guidance and moral-aesthetic regulation. Here, the giving of the personal gift by Miss Nash imposes obligation: the Annual Report lists various 'kindly-given' tea parties and resulting religious reformations which have strengthened cross-class 'sympathy.'²¹ Womanly missionary influence radiates out via the provision of holiday excursions and the teaching of embroidery. It is

²⁰ Booth B 178, 63-65.

²¹ Booth B 178, 65.

communicated through the bodies of the 'reformed' female labourers, who set out from the Institute not to carouse, but to moralize Bow, by teaching in local Sunday Schools and providing the gift of entertainments such as singing. Indeed, Nash's influence is understood to radiate through the reformed bodies of the club members to the wider workforce, the local churches, and all the way to Hong Kong. The Bible Class has adopted an orphan in this far-away colony, 'thus evincing their thoughtful interest in the welfare of others less well provided for.'²²

Baxter's summary employs frameworks of class and 'womanly' professionalism to interpret Nash, and to legitimize her presence on Fairfield Road. Communicating 'common sense', she is 'dressed like a hospital nurse'; she is 'not a lady in the conventional sense of the word; she belongs to the class from which come matrons and housekeepers.'²³ The text writes her as in some way both womanly and beyond gender.²⁴ Rather obviously, in her nurse's uniform, Nash represents the cleansing gleam both of womanly influence, and of medical or sanitary administration. She is the facilitator of the epidemic of health and happiness ('everything is very light, clean and cheerful') which circulates through the reformed employees of Bryant and May.²⁵ But Baxter's subsequent experience the manageress at The Welcome, on the Isle of Dogs, would be rather different.

²² Purvis, pp.63-70; Dina M. Copelman, 'The Gendered Metropolis: Fin-de-Siècle London', *Radical History Review* 60 (1994), 38-56.

²³ Booth B 178, pp.69. In Beatrice Potter Webb's assessment of the character and practice of fellow rent-collector Emma Cons we read similar formulations as she considers the difference between the 'pure organiser' represented by 'the active secretary to a growing society or the matron of a big hospital ...to a certain extent unsexed by the justice, push and severity required', and 'the governing and guiding woman' exerting on me 'personal influence.' Beatrice Webb, *The diary of Beatrice Webb*, ed. by Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, 4 vols (London: Virgao/LSE, 1982), I, pp. 136-137 (12 August 1885).

²⁴ 'The nurse's uniform offered middle-class women special protection in public, transporting them beyond gender': Walkowitz, *City*, p. 58. Note also that W. T. Stead summoned the figure of the matron as contrast to the sexualised females of George Egerton's 'New Woman' fiction: W. T. Stead, 'The Book of the Month: The Novel of the Modern Woman', *Review of Reviews* 10 (1894), p.68, qtd in Ledger *The New Woman*, p. 13.

²⁵ Booth B 178, 69.

**‘A LADY BLACKING YOUR OWN GRATE:
A.L. BAXTER WRITES THE WELCOME**

Forty-eight hours is a long time in social investigation. On 21st May 1897, only two days after interviewing Miss Nash at Clifden House, Arthur Lionel Baxter interviewed Miss Jean Price at The Welcome, an institute catering to factory girls, on West Ferry Road (now Westferry Road), a major thoroughfare on the west side of the Isle of Dogs.²⁶ Far from dressing in a nurse's uniform and presenting an obvious hygienic gleam, Jean Price challenged gender and class conventions, operating on the psycho-material boundaries marking class, gender and race - and The Welcome would merit more than one visit from apparently intrigued Booth associates.

The Isle of Dogs was difficult to reach by public transport and tended to be portrayed in contemporary accounts as isolated and dreary.²⁷ One Deaconess Smith of the Bromley Training Institute (the nursing branch of Grattan Guinness' Institute, where nurses were prepared for foreign missionary work through working with the urban poor), is quoted as telling Duckworth that much of the local factory work for this 'very poor' area lay with employers such as Bells, Bryant and May's, Berger's Starch, Far Famed Cake: factories which employed large numbers of women. She is recorded as identifying those working in jute production as the roughest girls of all, though match girls were also 'Very rough, very wild, very dirty but not by any means the

²⁶ Booth B173, 103. The road then ran south from the mouth of South Dock (the more southerly of the West India Docks). It is now much longer, meeting West India Dock Road at its northern end. See *The A to Z of Victorian London* (London Topographical Society, 1987), pp.53-54.

²⁷ George R. Sims, *Off the Track in London* (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1911), pp. 180-185; 'The Women's Settlements of London: St. Margaret's, House, Bethnal Green', *Sunday at Home*, 45 (1897-8), 250-1.

worst class of factory girls.’ Overall, factory women were not considered receptive to religion.²⁸

Significantly, the presence of working women on the street, combined with a lack of ‘wholesome’ places of entertainment or refreshment, were mentioned to the Booth team by a range of local observers. George Duckworth’s summary of an interview with Dr Corner of East India Dock Road and Mr Leach, a local employer, records that while the only amusement available to local men was the pub, the women employed in nearby factories manufacturing jam, pickles, matches and white lead presented a ‘sad’ spectacle of drunkenness and ‘rough play’ on public holidays: ‘If only they had some amusements to go to.’²⁹ Likewise, Mr Bullivant, an employer from West Ferry Road, is recorded as complaining of lack of entertainments in terms reminiscent of those employed by Walter Besant to describe the East End as cultural wasteland. There was, he asserted, ‘nothing nearer than the Queen’s [Music Hall] Poplar’. Although Bullivant’s wife had tried to get up concerts, ‘they were probably too good, and not well attended; what they like best are concerts and sing-songs got up among themselves’ - and football.³⁰

West Ferry Road itself was lined with commercial and industrial premises and there was a varied religious and missionary presence, including branches of the Church of England Young Men’s Society and the Salvation Army.³¹ At this time, the road offered a variety of places to eat or obtain cooked foods, including public houses,

²⁸ Booth B 173, pp. 213-219.

²⁹ Booth B 173, pp.143-150.

³⁰ Booth B 173. Bullivant would become involved with St. Mildred’s Settlement, being named as Treasurer in the 1908 annual report: London, Island History Trust, 0222, p. 7.

³¹ *The Post Office Directory for 1897, London* (London: Kelly & Co, 1897), pp. 756-757.

bakers' shops, dining rooms and coffee rooms.³² We are told by a fund-raising text produced in association with The Welcome that 3d was 'considered the most that a factory girl should spend on her dinner.'³³ More affordable basic fare such as buns, pastries, tripe, trotters and bloaters would have been available on West Ferry Road, usually for taking away. Fish and chips were relatively cheap and were becoming popular, but for many manual labourers it was beer that provided the favoured calorific 'fast' food.³⁴ It is apparent, then, that The Welcome was located in an urban environment through which working-class females moved, but for whom there were few establishments offering accessible and healthy refreshment with shelter.

The Welcome was not listed in the postal directory at the time of Baxter's visit, and was apparently a new enterprise.³⁵ Directed and staffed entirely by concerned females, it published an annual reports and fund-raising material. At this time, The Welcome appears to have taken up two buildings. (There was commonly piecemeal expansion of space in less well-funded charitable endeavours, as with ladies' settlement houses.) The Welcome hosted a range of community activities, although girls working at a local jam factory were a priority. The factory is not identified in the Booth notebooks or accompanying literature; but, as one of the larger industrial spaces on West Ferry Road was controlled by Morton John Thomas, jam manufacturer, it

³² John Burnett, *England Eats Out: A Social History of Eating Out in England, From 1830 to the Present* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2004), pp.108-109; *Post Office Directory*, pp.756-757.

³³ *Life among Factory Girls and Lads* ([n.p.] [n.d.]), p. 5 [fundraising booklet held with B173]. We are then informed that the 3d which the girls pay for their meals at the institute cannot cover overheads, i.e. this is not the commercial rate for providing a 'decent' cooked meal. Interestingly, Maude Stanley suggest that much lighter 'cheap refreshment' should be served in working girls' clubs, 'a penny and halfpenny a cup of tea or coffee, buns, pastry, &c., all according to the usual prices at coffee-taverns': Stanley, 'Clubs for Working Girls', p.82.

³⁴ See for example Burnett, pp 107-109. A variety of cheaper foodstuffs are mentioned in Baxter's summary, and in *Life among*, as being typical of the factory girls' diet prior to nutritional intervention by the supervisor. See also Ross, *Love and Toil*, pp. 40-49.

³⁵ Deduced from B Booth 173, 103, and from *Life Among*, pp. 1-3.

seems reasonable to suggest that the girls attending The Welcome worked there.³⁶ The club-house apparently stood within yards both of St Luke's Church and a new Anglican women's settlement, St. Mildred's House. St Mildred's would be officially opened in November 1897 by the Bishop of Stepney.³⁷ That tensions existed between The Welcome and the larger settlement is evidenced by Jean Price's comments about St Mildred's and those associated with it. Like The Welcome, St. Mildred's worked with local factory girls, but seems to have taken a more conservative approach, with a stress on temperance greater than that indicated by the words and publications of Jean Price.³⁸

Arthur Baxter's report states that he visited The Welcome twice: on the first occasion, '[Ernest] Aves and I went to lunch and afterwards assisted in waiting at the Factory Girls' dinner in the Coffee Tavern'; on the second occasion, A.L. Baxter went alone to tea at the institute before spending an hour and a half in the Factory Girls' Club.³⁹ The terms 'coffee tavern' and 'coffee (public) house' carried particular temperance and philanthropic implications: in the 1870s, for example, Dr Barnardo had opened coffee houses in London, and temperance organisations such as the Coffee Tavern Company and the Coffee Public-House National Society ran multiple outlets. From the 1880s many coffee taverns were running their enterprises on a more commercial footing, and a number of basic 'chain' coffee shops and caterers developed to serve the better paid working man and the lower middle classes.⁴⁰ From the point of

³⁶ *Post Office Directory*, p. 756

³⁷ Island History Trust, 0085:3, 5: *St Mildred's House Annual Report*, 1929.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp.4-5; Island History Trust 0222.

³⁹ Booth B179,103.

⁴⁰ J. Othick, 'The Cocoa and Chocolate Industry in the Nineteenth Century' in *The Making of the Modern British Diet*, ed. by Derek Oddy and Derek Miller (London: Croom Helm, 1976), pp.77-90 (p.86); D.J. Richardson, 'J. Lyons & Co. Ltd: Caterers and Food Manufacturers, 1894 to 1939' in *The Making of the Modern* ed. by Derek Oddy and Derek Miller, pp. 161-172 (pp.162-164); Robert Thorne, 'Places of Refreshment in the Nineteenth Century City' in *Buildings and Society: Essays on the Social*

view of a supervisor whose concern was female safety, whether physical or moral, a coffee tavern at a venue such as The Welcome might serve to attract factory girls away from the city streets, the public houses, and from the match women's 'disorderly' home environments.

Baxter furnishes an authoritative character sketch, reproducing dominant gender relations: 'Miss Price is a bright, cheery, and eminently sensible little woman.'⁴¹ Price, in her late thirties, was in fact an experienced missionary worker who had been working in the local area for some time: the census of 1891 shows her living with other ladies at a mission house connected to Christ Church, Isle of Dogs. Born in Ripon, it appears that Price was educated at a boarding establishment in London. She may then have worked as a governess in Lincolnshire before turning to missionary work.⁴²

Baxter does allude to Price's considerable experience working 'in the Island' (that is, on the Isle of Dogs), before characterizing her religious identity and outlook. He links her 'sensible' qualities to a perceived lack of religious zeal or condescension in her manner. The investigator for the 'Religious Influences' survey appears suspicious of religious enthusiasm, and Price is applauded in terms of her pragmatic individual work to raise physical and moral standards: 'She is a keen high churchwoman and lays great stress on the religious side of her work; none of the work must be strictly secular. [...] At the same time I could see no signs of any unwise

Development of the Built Environment, ed. by Anthony D. King (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 228-253 (pp.244-246); Burnett, pp.46-50.

⁴¹ Booth B 173, .103.

⁴² Census references: *1871 census*: RG10, Piece 682, Folio 42, page 27; *1881 census*: RG11, Piece 3291, Folio 101, page 7; *1891 census*: RG12, Piece 337, Folio 6, page 5.

thrusting of religion upon the girls. [...] There was no suspicion of goody-goodness.’⁴³

Baxter lists the branches of work undertaken at The Welcome, typical of the kinds of clubs and activities then undertaken by volunteers attached to churches, missions and settlements: a club for young girls; a club for factory girls; a Mothers’ Meeting; a Provident Bank; the Coffee Tavern; a ‘Club for rough boys meeting on Saturdays.’⁴⁴ The associate describes the building which houses The Welcome: it is ‘of inadequate dimension’; the Coffee Tavern is at the front and Miss Price and two other ladies live over it, thus maintaining a constant presence on West Ferry Road; at the rear is ‘the club room, a barn like structure, long and narrow.’⁴⁵ He notes that his visit at the dinner hour with Aves was on a Monday, the least busy weekday: ‘[A]s a rule some of them have to dine on the stairs and in the kitchen’.⁴⁶ A significant slice of Baxter’s report is given over to what the club members are actually eating – whether on the stairs or otherwise - and to what they ate in the past. Having observed the girls attending The Welcome with produce such as meat, fish, corned beef and bloaters, and purchasing on the premises bread and butter or marmalade, soup, rice pudding and tea, Baxter states:

Miss Price told me that when the tavern was first opened it was almost impossible to get them to eat wholesome food; they would have nothing but cake cheesecakes, and pastry; owing chiefly to their food they all looked pasty and anaemic. Wiser habits have effected a great change in their appearance. With one or two exceptions they now certainly looked wonderfully healthy.⁴⁷

⁴³ Booth B173, 103-105.

⁴⁴ Booth B173, 105; *Life Among*, pp.13-21 offers a sympathetically-accented representation of the boys and their club.

⁴⁵ Booth B173, 106-7.

⁴⁶ Booth B 173, 107; see also *Life Among*, pp.3-4.

⁴⁷ Booth B173, 106-7. To *bring* food to clubs and commercial coffee shops (as long as supplementary food or drink was then purchased on the premises) was not uncommon at this time: see Peter Bird, *First Food Empire: A History of J. Lyons and Co.* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2000), p37; Ross, *Love and Toil*, p. 40.

The foods enjoyed by the girls prior to ‘teaching’ by Price are tinned foods and ‘cheap cake and unwholesome pastry’ in ‘large quantities’: big helpings of high-protein and high-carbohydrate foods for workers undertaking arduous physical labour - and demonstrating limited, but independent, spending power.⁴⁸ The Welcome promoted such ‘wholesome’ foods as rice pudding, ‘good soup’, stews ‘thickened with pearl barley’, tapioca.⁴⁹ These were just the kinds of food which (in contrast to newly-available cake and tinned meat) those in poverty associated with invalidism and dependency - with soup kitchens, hospitals and workhouses.⁵⁰ The foods served by Price carried a complex moral charge, standing against foods of ‘irresponsibility’, of lack of forethought. It is possible that Jean Price grasped the complexity of the cultural, as well as physical, barriers to these girls and their relatives enjoying ‘stews thickened with pearl barley’ in a domestic environment.⁵¹

Baxter has now turned from ‘reading’ the ‘character’ Price to a collective ‘reading’ of those girls he encounters within the club building. As discussed in the previous chapter, in his important identification of the exhibitionary complex Tony Bennett delineates the connections between emerging modes of surveillance and spectacle, which performed intersecting social functions during the nineteenth century. Bennett refers variously to the confinement and subjection of deviant bodies to ‘disciplinary technologies which sought to modify behaviour through repetition’, the rendering of urban processes to public inspection, and the exhibition of bodies as signifiers of progress at leisure zones which ‘rendered the whole world metonymically

⁴⁸ Booth B 173, 107; *Life Among*, p. 7; Clementina Black, *Sweated Industry and the Minimum Wage* (London: Duckworth, 1907), pp.26-27.

⁴⁹ Booth B173, 107.

⁵⁰ Ross *Love and Toil* pp. 31-37; Burnett, pp.28-29; F.K. Prochaska, ‘Body and Soul: Bible Nurses and the Poor in Victorian London’, *Historical Research*, 60 (1987), 337-48 (p.341).

⁵¹ Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound A Week* (London: G.Bell & Sons, 1914), p. 59; Jane Lewis, *Women in England*, pp. 28-30; Ross, *Love and Toil*, pp. 49-50.

present.⁵² At The Welcome in May 1897, Baxter noted that the girls will not ‘play games’ but that they were ‘after much coyness induced to sing’, observing that, ‘The behaviour of all was quiet and orderly. Both in the Coffee Tavern and the Club the girls were of the regular factory type, though much more decent in their behaviour, and more soberly dressed. They are evidently devoted to Miss Price, whose manner to them is excellent.’⁵³ As Baxter undertakes his inspection of young women on West Ferry Road, it is arguable that East London and its female labourers are rendered metonymically available to transformative intervention.

But then things begin to be said, and things begin to happen, which disrupt this narrative, this exhibition. While Jean Price’s influence on the inculcation of wholesome habits of consumption is noted as exemplary, Price’s words and actions before Baxter, and then before his colleague George Duckworth, render more suspect and regressive forms of corporeality ‘metonymically present’ in the club-house. This less conventional turn of events begins with Price’s telling Baxter that she is training a girl, who lives at The Welcome, in the ways of domestic service. She tells him that she is doing so despite her antipathy towards the entry of the ‘regular factory type’ into such service. The reasons which she gives for objecting to the ‘lowest class’ of girl entering service can be located among long-established discourses uneasy at the placing of disorderly young women – including prostitutes – in domestic service. Baxter notes that ‘Miss Price has a theory that as a rule Factory work is better for girls of the lowest class than service; she believes that an enormous proportion of fallen women come from among servants’⁵⁴

⁵² Bennet, pp.77-96.

⁵³ Booth B 173, 109.

⁵⁴ Booth B 173, 11.

Narratives around service as potentially ruinous intersected with concerns around the love of finery, figuring cross-class intimacy as potentially dangerous: the servant was in peril of seduction by an employer or an insinuating visitor (economic exploitation could be masked as moral capitulation); the young rural woman was open to temptation from the moment she arrived amid the city's glares, and might prostitute herself for spending money.⁵⁵ By the end of the nineteenth century, a number of organizations were working to 'protect' servants from these temptations. The promotion of such explanations for prostitution and institutionalization occurred in relation to a range of other discourses and were not necessarily reactionary; nor were they uncontested. Price's moral preference for the factory over service corresponds with that of Clementina Black, who suggested that the majority of 'ruined' women in refuges were former servants. Indeed, one fundraising text produced by The Welcome cites a survey by the Women's Industrial Council as evidence of a relationship between employment as a servant, and the 'fall' into prostitution.⁵⁶ However, regardless of emerging discourses which presented domestic service in its Victorian form as anachronistic, a relic of feudalism, St. Mildred's Settlement, adjacent to The Welcome, would place girls in domestic service on a large scale.⁵⁷

In this context, the reasons given by Price for retaining this servant are intriguing. She only keeps a servant, she tells Baxter, because 'it was unwise to do this work when there was other work which there was no one else to do.' Her assertion of

⁵⁵ Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan 1975), pp. 133-138; Walkowitz, *Prostitution* discusses perceived links between service and prostitution, and the contrasting results of various surveys of the former occupations of incarcerated and 'reformed' prostitutes. See also Valverde.

⁵⁶ Clementina Black 'The Dislike to Domestic Service' *Nineteenth Century* 33 (1893), 454-456 (p. 455); *Life Among*, p. 11; Note however, F.K. Prochaska's contrary argument: F.K. Prochaska, 'Female Philanthropy and Domestic Service in Victorian England', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 54 (1981), 79-85 (pp.79-81).

⁵⁷ Island History Trust, 0222: Kathleen Wintour and Katharine Bradford, *The Story of St. Mildred's House on the Isle of Dogs* ([n.p.] [n.d.]), pp.10-11.

her own willingness to undertake household chores is interesting enough, but to this she adds the following observation: When she attempted domestic work herself, her ‘poor neighbours’ decried the sight of ‘a lady blacking your own grate’ and would offer to send, for example, ‘My Eliza’ to carry out the work.⁵⁸

There are a few points to be made about Jean Price’s statement. Any conduct of Miss Price’s which tended towards domestic labour may well have been interpreted by the elite investigator as rebellious or eccentric. As Seth Koven notes, the ‘lady’ settler undertaking hard domestic chores registered ‘an assault on class and gender norms’ well into the twentieth century, and could be linked to radical social awakening which ‘stood within but also criticized a long traditional of cross-class sisterhood in the slums.’⁵⁹ It is possible that the idea of the lady superintendent with blackened skin would have unsettled Baxter, whose investment in a conventional (class-gender) understanding is apparent in his report.⁶⁰ The act of blacking the grate was implicated in the symbolism of ‘Otherness’ in complex ways, and particularly in relation to those anxieties around corporeal-sanitary boundaries and the maintenance, or reassertion, of social and racial hierarchies which are expressed again and again in the texts analysed in this thesis. Baxter however remains impressed enough to note that Price does ‘admirable work’ in a ‘thoroughly wise and practical manner’.⁶¹ But this would not be the final encounter between Jean Price and the Booth investigators.

⁵⁸ Booth B 173, 109-111.

⁵⁹ Koven, *Slumming*: 190.

⁶⁰ Davidoff, ‘Mastered for Life; Leonore Davidoff, ‘Class and Gender’, pp.17-71; Stallybrass and White; McClintock *Imperial*.

⁶¹ Booth B173, 113.

‘SHE LOOKS LIKE *ONE OF US!*’:

GEORGE DUCKWORTH WRITES THE WELCOME

On the Saturday following Baxter’s visit, George Duckworth called at The Welcome and took tea there. It is possible that he was with someone else (he states that, ‘tea was going to which we were invited’ but there is no indication thereafter that he was accompanied). It would appear that this visit, in common with those by Aves and Baxter, occurred through general open invitation rather than formal arrangement.⁶² That the Booth associates chose to visit The Welcome at least three times suggests that the club and its superintendent were of particular interest to them.

I would suggest that Duckworth’s report of his encounter with Miss Price hints at unease around the ‘meaning’ of this particular establishment. The Welcome existed as a space appropriated (except at set times of the week) by women, and managed by ‘odd’ women (at least one of whom was of High Church persuasion), operating outside the customary domestic ordering of their class. Unlike a ladies’ settlement, The Welcome had no ‘brother’ institution, no male committee members and no male warden.⁶³ In contrast to spaces such as department stores, or the elite West End ladies’ clubs, at this time arguably losing their collective reputation as ‘serious-minded’ and progressive institutions, The Welcome was a place where females exercised overt and unambiguous authority.⁶⁴ Miss Price, her elite helpers and her servant were women sleeping, living and managing, soberly and ‘religiously,’ on these premises. Evidently these were unconventional domestic arrangements.

⁶² Booth B 179, 113.

⁶³ For example, ‘The Women’s Settlements of London: The Women’s University Settlement’, *Sunday at Home* 45 (1897-8), 167.

⁶⁴ *Life Among*, p. 1; Bowlby, *Just Looking*, pp. 66-82; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, pp. 74-107.

Male apprehension around the possible contentment of unmarried women and threats to traditional domesticity may be identified even in such a positive piece of journalism as Frederick Dolman's article 'Ladies Clubs' in *The Ludgate*. Having described a variety of West End clubs catering to the needs of aristocrats and intellectuals (including such writers of New Woman fiction as Olive Schreiner and Sarah Grand), he suggests that women's clubs may provide 'self-defence' for women – a pseudo-domestic space offering 'consolation' to 'spinsters'.⁶⁵ The sexologist Havelock Ellis, having described the 'movement of emancipation' of women as 'on the whole... wholesome and inevitable', worried that, '[H]aving been taught independence of men and disdain for the old theory which placed women in the moated grange of the home to sigh for a man who never comes, a tendency develops for women to carry this independence still further and to find love where they find work.'⁶⁶ As Sally Ledger points out, the 'unwholesome' environments associated with 'acquired' lesbianism in Ellis's text are uniformly associated with nineteenth-century feminism.⁶⁷

Thus in reading the text of the Booth notebooks, we should acknowledge that so absolute a form of self-regulating 'female' space as The Welcome may have aroused curiosity, and, potentially, anxiety or disapproval on the part of elite investigators who would have had more conservative models of female philanthropic effort available to them. Duckworth's mother (Leslie Stephen's second wife) was a sponsor of Octavia Hill's housing schemes. Duckworth's sister Stella had started working (voluntarily, of course) for Octavia Hill in 1895, and died in 1897, the year in which Duckworth visited The Welcome. Whatever her degree of involvement with

⁶⁵ Frederick Dolman, 'Ladies' Clubs', *The Ludgate*, 3 n.s., (1896), 18.

⁶⁶ Havelock Ellis, 'Sexual Inversion in Women', *Alienist and Neurologist*, 16 (1895), 155-156.

⁶⁷ Ledger, *New Woman*, p.156. .

philanthropic endeavour, Duckworth's mother did not neglect her role as domestic 'lady': indeed, that identity was key to the kinds of social action she undertook.⁶⁸

Significantly, Duckworth saw the fact that Jean Price had been 'busy, staining the floor I think, of one of her rooms' (before he arrived unexpectedly) as worthy of note: a physical manifestation of those challenges to gender and class conventions articulated previously by Price to Baxter.⁶⁹ During Baxter's visit, she had merely spoken of blacking the grate, and had then pointed out that she kept a servant. In Duckworth's report, however, she has been 'caught', if not in the act, then in the aftermath, perhaps in the marks and pungency, of staining a floor. Duckworth's report continues:- 'but the conversation turned on dress and the necessity of never looking untidy or careless. Miss Price herself avoids this although she does stain floors and put on a white apron when she goes down to serve in the coffee-room'.⁷⁰ It is as if, under the gaze of the investigator, the privileged woman is attempting to repudiate a possible, if unspoken, charge.

On one level, that charge might be one of eccentricity or theatricality. Voluntary material poverty could be associated with High Church asceticism, seen by some as 'artificial' in comparison to the 'tasteful' and socially-stratified aestheticism practiced at Toynbee Hall, with which so many of Booth's team were connected.⁷¹ And the undertaking of housework by Jean Price could have carried political implications. As indicated during the foregoing discussion of A.L. Baxter's encounter with Price, the undertaking of housework by elite female settlers could present a

⁶⁸ Noel Annan *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), p. 120. Gillian Darley, *Octavia Hill: A Life* (London: Constable, 1990), pp. 153-154; Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Booth B 173, 113.

⁷⁰ Booth B 173, 113.

⁷¹ Deborah E. B. Wiener, *Architecture and Social Reform in Late-Victorian London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.167.

scornful commentary on the pretence that their ‘voluntary’ poverty resembled that of the working classes.⁷² The notion of the city streets as polluting, as morally staining, is crucial to definitions of a club such as The Welcome as necessary and purifying: as Mary Douglas noted in her influential text addressing social taboo, ‘[The body’s] boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.’⁷³ Kneeling (as in scrubbing, preparing and staining a floor), ‘one of the habitual postures of the maid of all work’, was the antithesis of the disciplined postures learnt by the growing bourgeois child.⁷⁴

The undertaking of this kind of ‘degrading’ housework, connected in complex ways to social-sanitary boundaries, by a middle-class superintendent, may then have carried negative implications with regard to The Welcome as ordering refuge - or as an earnest enterprise to be taken seriously. However, Price is quick to assure Duckworth that, in the presence of those she ought to influence, she dresses tidily, cleanly, *whitely*, respectably: without stain, even as she serves. For hers is true service, practical and spiritual, not the indulgence of (spinsterly?) fantasy, not the careless surrender of sanitary and class distinction. Thus she provides an example which defines her own ‘transgression’ as no transgression at all. Duckworth retells Price’s fascinating tale of Miss Barry,

who is coming down to work at the new ladies settlement. When she first appeared in the Island she was decidedly well-dressed, and the girls noticed it and liked it. After a few months, during which she had been working some other poor part, the club-girls were invited to meet Miss Barry at some evening function. Meanwhile her habit as regards dress seem [sic] to have changed and when the girls came back they were full of it: “Oh; Miss Price! How Miss Barry has changed! She looks like *one of us*!”⁷⁵

⁷² Koven, *Slumming*, pp.190-191.

⁷³ Douglas, *Purity*, p.4.

⁷⁴ Stallybrass and White, p.154.

⁷⁵ Booth B173, 113-115; emphasis is Duckworth’s.

Miss Barry, indulging in cross-class masquerade, is effectively denounced as a frivolous ‘slummer’ by one who views her own presence in the slums as earnest, moral, consistent. For Price, the undertaking of housework is not degrading, patronising, theatrical, or romantic. Miss Barry, by contrast, transgresses class boundaries destructively by *descending* into an alien visual culture – a descent which is counter-productive in terms of ‘influencing’ the local girls. She indulges in the obvious pretence of being ‘*like one of us*’. Of cross-cultural and cross-class dressing, Gail Ching-Liang Low has written:

[...] the act of donning another’s clothing, I would argue, is seldom indicative of the disruption of power hierarchies. Instead, it works – however problematically – towards reinforcing them. [...] Clothes as surface, visual, and imaginative signs are integral to the rhetoric of disguise [...] the fact that you can put them on or take them off [...] renders them ideal in a fantasy which plays on identity and difference.⁷⁶

Jean Price offers up Miss Barry as evidence - the very definition - of her own authenticity and authority, as recognized by the girls themselves. The girls’ return from the ‘function’ to talk about Barry figures as a return to the designated and authentic moral space of The Welcome, distinguished alike from the urban street and the theatre of Barry’s self-indulgence. Perhaps Price and Duckworth can agree that Barry has failed to refine ‘the girls’, who had originally ‘noticed’ and ‘liked’ her superior dress.⁷⁷ For Miss Barry is presented to Duckworth as one who embodies triviality and aimlessness – in the sense of an absorbent and improper mobility. In contrast to Price, who works earnestly at her domestic chores in a fixed and stable environment, Barry is presented as lacking in permanence and consistency, moving about geographically as well as culturally. Her lack of spatial fixity (‘place’) and her cultural transformations,

⁷⁶ Gail Ching-Liang Low, ‘White Skins/Black Masks: The Pleasures and Politics of Imperialism’, *New Formations* 9 (1989), 83-103 (pp.83-92); she suggests that cross-class and cross-cultural dressing are not identical but that ‘the dynamics of the two fantasies are very similar’ nonetheless (p.91).

⁷⁷ There are echoes here of the missionary aestheticism identified by Diana Maltz both in the glorification by Octavia Hill of her lady visitors as moral influences partly through visual appeal: Maltz, *British Aestheticism*, pp. 147-148.

are interlocked signifiers of disorder, of threatened boundaries as she succumbs to, is soiled by, the 'outcast' city and its subcultures.

Despite asserting her moral credentials, however, it seems that Price has not *quite* convinced Duckworth of her 'common sense'. He ends his brief report on a note of approval, but not before registering with apparent amusement, Price's unwillingness to work with 'the new Ladies Settlement' in view of the allegedly 'secular' nature of some of the work undertaken. 'By this she meant that the religious element would not be always introduced.'⁷⁸ The settlement in question is undoubtedly St. Mildred's, and so, in her references to Miss Barry, Price contests the legitimacy of the new settlement.

Price's move to define herself as 'authentic' as set against Barry may have prompted Duckworth to view her 'religious' objections in terms of a turf war: the 'Miss Barry' referred to is surely Miss Hilda Barry, subsequently the Hon. Mrs Reginald Fremantle, who had come up with the idea of a settlement on the Isle of Dogs while taking a bicycle trip there with Winnington Ingram, Head of Oxford House, in 1896. Ingram, who was soon afterwards made Bishop of Stepney, and thereafter Bishop of London, continued his connection with the enterprise for many years, while Barry would be honoured subsequently as 'foundress' of St. Mildred's.⁷⁹ Ingram used to amuse people by claiming that one of them had fallen into a ditch on that first investigatory mission.⁸⁰

Duckworth gives details contradicting Price's objections to the new settlement: it 'will be a branch of St Margaret's House that works closely with Oxford House, in

⁷⁸ Booth B 179, 115.

⁷⁹ *St. Mildred's Annual Report* 1929, p.5; Wintour and Bradford, p.7; 'The Women's Settlements: St. Margaret's House', p. 250.

⁸⁰ Wintour and Bradford, p.7.

Bethnal Green' and will be closely connected with the Church of England; indeed, he notes, an oratory is being built for the new Settlement.⁸¹ In fact, St. Mildred's was one of several new institutions, including St. Hilda's East, Hoxton, and the planned Oxford Trinity Mission at Stratford, which had strong links with Oxford House in Bethnal Green and with its female 'branch', St. Margaret's House.⁸² 'Miss Hilda Barry, who for over a year has worked at St. Margaret's House, has zealously promoted and liberally helped this movement', reported one contemporary in 1897.⁸³

We are unable to interrogate Price's reported response to St. Mildred's and Miss Barry. While acknowledging that Price may have found the arrival of a new High Church settlement 'next door' to The Welcome overwhelming, given her own long service on the Isle of Dogs and St Mildred's resources and potential scope, to dismiss the intensity of her religious sentiments, to read this summary of her reaction primarily in terms of anxieties around status (for example), would be to risk losing an important dimension in the work of women like Jean Price.⁸⁴ It may be that her objections to the placing of girls in service, her focus on local employment practices, made her wary with regard to the anticipated practices of the new settlement. It could be that its regulated space and the overseen – if not regimented – activities of the privileged women who would live there struck Price as in some way contrived or lacking in the humility necessary for 'truly' Christian work.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Booth B 179, 115. For the physical conversion of the old Millwall Dock Club into a settlement, see Wintour and Bradford pp. 7-8.

⁸² For the relationship of Mayfield House to Cheltenham Ladies College, to Oxford University and St. Margaret's House (later called St. Hilda's East) see 'The Settlements of London: St. Hilda's East Settlement' and 'The Hoxton Settlement', *Sunday at Home* 45 (1897-98): 441-444. 'The Women's Settlements of London: St. Margaret's House, Bethnal Green', *ibid*, p.: 250. See also Tower Hamlets Archive, 360.3. *St. Mildred's Annual Report* 1908, p. 8; *St Mildred's Annual Report* 1929:5.

⁸³ 'The Women's Settlements of London: St. Margaret's House, Bethnal Green', *Sunday at Home* 45 (1897-98), p.250.

⁸⁴ For the scale of St. Mildred's early work see *St. Mildred's Annual Report* 1929, p.35; Wintour and Bradford, pp.8-12.

⁸⁵ For the communal lifestyle and demanding work schedule of the women's settlements, see Vicinus *Independent*, p.229; 'St Hilda's East Settlement', p. 444.

Concluding his report, Duckworth echoes his colleague Baxter, stressing a perceived lack of ‘obtrusiveness in the method of combination [of religiosity and secularism which] Miss Price adopts’ and endorses the ‘coffee-shop’ as being, of necessity, ‘entirely secular.’⁸⁶ For Price, all work undertaken earnestly ‘for Christ and those who are made in his image’, may have been regarded as religious. Again, we cannot know. What we do know is that Price behaved as if keen to convert her undertaking of household chores from a potential sign of disorder or eccentricity into a sign of commitment and steadfastness. She sought to banish the spectre of the messy female body, liable to the seductions of subculture, from The Welcome – and it is telling that she did so through the projection of grubby and suspect modes of mobility onto the unseen figure of Miss Barry.

⁸⁶ Booth B 179, 115; compare with Baxter’s notes at B179, 103-5.

PART TWO

Chapter Five

PENETRATING THE SURFACE:

MARGARET HARKNESS'S *A CITY GIRL*

AND COMMODITY FETISHISM

Deborah Epstein Nord's discussion of the work of women such as Margaret Harkness, Beatrice Webb, Eleonor Marx and Olive Schreiner in London in the 1880s outlines their forging of 'a new urban vision, in which they struggled to become subject and observer rather than object and observed.' Beatrice Webb started 'observing' in earnest during her time as a lady rent collector at Katherine Buildings during 1885.¹ Like other lady volunteers working at model dwellings in late-Victorian London - enterprises merging philanthropic impulses and an adherence to market economics – Webb was expected to exert elite womanly influence while ensuring tenants paid their rent on time. However, here and during her investigations for the Booth inquiry, as Nord's work explores in such depth, Webb endeavoured to 'assume the professional, "scientific" stance of the male social investigator, suppressing her gender and her sense of vulnerability.'²

Her cousin Margaret Harkness was lodging at the buildings at around the same time, 'observing' the tenants in her own way. Margaret Harkness, was, like her cousin, trying something new, introducing into her own writing about the working classes 'elements alien to the conventions of late nineteenth-century realism'³. Producing social investigation and fiction at a time when the female writer was restricted by

¹ Nord, *Walking*, p. 12; Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, 2nd ed (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1946), pp 223-239; Deborah Epstein Nord *The Apprenticeship of Beatrice Webb* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp 125-140.

² Nord, *Walking*, p. 184.

³ Ibid, p. 193

conventions regarding subject matter and appropriate ‘voice’ Harkness published under a male pseudonym, writing in a stripped-down style and addressing the same ‘masculine’ issues as her cousin. Her novels are feats of rhetorical activism, allowing her a public platform which would have been difficult to obtain in her political activities.

What I want to argue here, is that when Harkness produced a novel about the dangers presented to impoverished femininity in fin-de-siècle London, she focused on the commodity cultures which she saw infiltrating the everyday experience of the poorest inhabitants of the city. Commercial spectacle is central to most of the slum fictions addressed in the second part of this thesis. Writing in 1887, Harkness depicts the female body of East London as inscribed by visual cultures and mass-produced narratives of romance. As in the writing of George Gissing and Arthur Morrison, this engagement with urban cultures is depicted as malignant. Harkness’s depiction however, differs, in that she interprets this engagement as mystification within a class society.

In this chapter, the merits of approaching slum narratives through the prism of consumption become most apparent. For the sophistication of Harkness’s critique has proved easy to overlook during the last century-and-a-quarter. In Friedrich Engels’ well-known letter to Harkness of spring 1888, reviewing *A City Girl*, he states that the work ‘exhibits the courage of the true artist’ but suggests that although the characters in the story are ‘typical enough’, the ‘circumstances which surround them and make them act are perhaps not equally so.’⁴ As Terry Eagleton observes, Engels effectively reads *A City Girl* as a naturalist text. That is to say, in Marxian terms, that the text fails

⁴ Engels, Frederick, ‘Letter to Margaret Harkness’ in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels On Literature and Art* ed. by Lee Baxandall (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), pp. 89-91 (p.91).

to produce a sense of the working classes as participants in history, and that the novel does not penetrate immediate phenomena, 'the photography of the moment', to present a vibrant image of social processes.⁵ Instead the working class 'figures as a passive mass, unable to help itself.'⁶

For some recent critics, however, Harkness fashions an exciting new mode of political fiction out of the same instabilities which have led so many critics to accuse her of ideological unease, inconsistencies of voice. Kevin Swafford's Marxian commentary suggests that, unlike Zola, Harkness was indeed reaching for an image of the social totality, 'seek[ing] to uncover the primacy of economic relations in the determination of social position and experience' and that what she produced was a kind of social realism, rather than naturalism.⁷ It is through employing both Marxist approaches to cultural form and reception, and feminist readings of the literature of modernity, that the following case study uncovers the hidden dialectic at work in *A City Girl* and argues that in her first published novel Harkness seeks to combat capitalist fragmentation. The text historicizes 'reality' by penetrating the surface phenomena, the phantasmagoria, of the modern city. The novel depicts, not merely the 'passive mass', but a process of pacification through exposure to a prefabricated and ahistorical culture which integrates the consumer rather than liberating her.

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: (1976), p. 43; 'The Modern French Novel', *Quarterly Review* 170 (1890), 315.

⁶ Engels, pp. 89-92.

⁷ John Goode, 'Margaret Harkness and the Socialist Novel', in *The Socialist Novel in Britain: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition*, ed. by H. Gustav Klaus (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 1982), pp. 45-66 (pp.53-57); Nord Walking, pp. 193- 197. Kevin Swafford, *Class in Late-Victorian Britain: The Narrative Concern with Social Hierarchy and its Representation* (New York: Columbia Press, 2007), p. 62. See also, Ingrid Von Rosenberg, 'French Naturalism and the English Socialist Novel: Margaret Harkness and William Edwards Tirebuck', in., *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880-1914* ed. by H. Gustav Klaus (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), pp. 151-171 (pp. 155-6). However, for concern that traces of biological theory in Harkness's work undermine her socialist-feminist project see Ledger, *New Woman*, p. 49; BiØrhovde, p. 83; Eileen Sypher, *Wisps of Violence: Producing Public and Private Politics in the Turn-of-the-Century British Novel* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 110.

Analysis of this novel bolsters my thesis, for despite an absence of explicit tropes of engulfment, the text represents the city's phantasmagoria as destructive, even as poisonous. *A City Girl* is evidence that elite disquiet around feminine response to new aesthetics was not confined to the sight of privileged women shopping in the West End. As I now discuss, the novel presents a coherent, if problematic, socialist project in which feminine cultural reception intersects with sexual seduction, and commercial cultures are complicit in myths of democracy and social mobility.

**BENJAMIN AND ADORNO:
UNLOCKING HARKNESS'S CRITIQUE OF FETISHISM**

The case study which follows employs theoretical tools appropriate to uncovering *A City Girl*'s complex representation of nascent mass culture as mystifying artifice. It utilizes the associated and contrasting approaches to popular and elite aesthetics developed by Walter Benjamin (whose work has been discussed in the Introduction to this thesis), Theodor Adorno and Georg Lukács. In the case of Adorno, the focus will be his conception of the social formation of cultural produce, and of individuals as consumers.

No reconciliation of these approaches to art, literature and mass culture can be, or is, sought. Rather, treating *A City Girl* as a socialist critique of late-Victorian cultural forms, this study seeks access to the text's subtle and disciplined cultural penetrations through an appeal to subsequent Marxist, and Marxist-derived, aesthetic theories. This approach discloses *A City Girl*'s uncertainty respecting modernity's dialectic-revolutionary potential. For while it figures popular-cultural forms in terms of an enticement and toxicity to which women are particularly susceptible, its heroine's

first step towards social-political enlightenment is evoked in terms of commercial display and optical illusion.

As is well known, Theodor Adorno's critique of late capitalist (American) culture was grounded in his own experiences of escaping Nazism: he returned to Germany from America in 1949. In applying elements of Adorno's work, this analysis seeks not to collapse historical and cultural contexts, but to open up a text written by a socialist, operating 'at the point of the many tensions of the labour movement' whose writing explores the ways in which the structures of the social order are both inscribed and obscured in sensation-rich cultural forms, resulting in manipulation by mass-produced fictions.⁸ For Adorno, great art structurally replicates a whole totality of social relations. In late-nineteenth-century neo-romantic musical forms produced by composers such as Tchaikovsky and Dvorák, however, sentimental or sensational themes and effects were maximized, repeated, and melodies merely coincided arbitrarily, without true interrelations or development.⁹

This had disastrous implications for social process. A standardization of cultural produce, operating across modern popular-cultural forms, replicated not the totality of social relations but modes of technological production and recycling. Popular, manufactured cultural produce manipulated the collective consciousness to the extent that the individual produced by late capitalism was effectively incapable of autonomous, critical consciousness. Adorno wrote that, 'The romantic dissolution of the pre-conceived unity into its details, something which once pressed the right of the

⁸ Goode, 'Margaret Harkness', p. 52.

⁹ Particularly helpful for an appreciation of Adorno's work on popular culture are: Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* (London: Heinemann, 1973); Max Halle Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Robert W. Witkin, 'Why Did Adorno Hate Jazz?', *Sociological Theory* 18 (2000), 145-70; Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003).

individual against the inflexibility of the totality, nevertheless harboured its opposite, the process of mechanization, in its very principle: the emancipated details first becomes an effect and finally a trick.’¹⁰

This reading of mass culture in terms of an overpowering orthodoxy and false consciousness departs clearly from that of Walter Benjamin. As is well known, Adorno opposed Benjamin’s paper ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility’ (1936) for what he saw as its buttressing of the emancipating pretensions of popular culture. In his paper, Benjamin situates fetish-consciousness in high art rather than in popular aesthetics: for him, the reproducibility of the ‘original’ work by technical means enables its penetration of collective consciousness and thus social practice. It is ‘emancipated’ from its ‘here and now [...] its unique existence in a particular place’ and thus from its ‘aura’, ‘the concept of its authenticity’ and its ‘parasitic subservience to ritual’.¹¹

Benjamin links a democratization of arts practice to an increased political participation: ‘[T]he whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead to being based on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics.’¹² Moreover, Benjamin links this increased critical-political participation to radically different modes of perception and response. Mechanically-produced art, in concert with the urban environment, fragments and excites the spectator’s faculties and advances a form of ‘habitual’ and distractive awareness. Benjamin’s thesis was read by Adorno as an endorsement of

¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays On Mass Culture* ed. by J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 72 - 87.

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version’ in Walter Benjamin *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* ed. by Micheal W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, Thomas Y. Levin, trans by Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone and Howard Eiland (London: Belknap/Harvard University, 2008) pp.19-55, (pp. 21-24).

¹² Ibid, p.25.

popular culture, an assertion of its deliverance from 'aura'. By contrast, Adorno contended that mass-produced goods are dissociated from the social relations that produce them, and that this alienation is what produces fetish-consciousness. Furthermore, mass culture produced baleful fetishistic attitudes, cultic responses, for example, to 'stars' of the film industry. He suggested that 'Every tenor voice comes to sound like a Caruso record,' critiquing a 'mechanical reproduction of beauty.'¹³

For Adorno, serious modernist art reproduced this dissociation between subject and object in a different way, in its very fabric. Its detachment, its 'aura', was intrinsic to its critical potency. To overcome its remoteness was not, as Benjamin asserted, to emancipate it through its absorption into mass consciousness.¹⁴ It was merely to grind 'autonomous' art into the repetitive dross, the 'baby-food', of mass culture.¹⁵ Thus Adorno advocated the demanding, concentrated focus, which he saw as essential to an authentic engagement with remote, critical works of art. The distractive modes of reception and response, so encouraging to Benjamin, Adorno condemned as regressive, as injurious to the critical faculties, writing that 'Deconcentration is the perceptual activity which prepares the way for the forgetting and sudden recognition of mass music [... Listeners are] in any case no longer capable of concentrated listening.'¹⁶

In Adorno's view, then, positive engagement of any kind with modern cultural produce degraded the capacity for autonomous thought: it was impossible for critical consciousness to advance through participation in mass culture. Yet although this

¹³ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), p. 140.

¹⁴ Benjamin, 'Work of Art', p. 40.

¹⁵ Adorno *Culture Industry*, p. 67.

¹⁶ Adorno *Culture Industry*, p. 49.

thesis regarding aesthetic commodity-production owed much to the Marxist critic Georg Lukács, there were major differences between them when it came to the relationship between the social-political and the aesthetic.¹⁷ Whereas Lukács defended forms of literary realism which represented the social ‘totality’ and countered detriments of capitalism such as alienation, Adorno thought that the politically committed socialist-realist texts so admired by Lukács were regressive, rooted in an earlier stage of capitalism. The role of literature, declared Adorno, is not to attempt a ‘spurious’ totality but to *evoke* fragmentation, alienation, repression: not to resolve, but to embody, ‘the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure.’¹⁸

As indicated in the Introduction to this thesis, a variety of feminist criticism has subtly explicated and developed Adorno’s critical theory, finding his critique of identity logic, and key concepts such as commodification and the authoritarian personality, productive in exploring the cultural production of femininity.¹⁹ As Lisa Yun Lee suggests, ‘[I]n a typical dialectical fashion, the negative presence of women [in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*] can be read as a particularly powerful form of feminist critique.’²⁰ The location of fears around engulfment by a feminized mass consumerism in the work of Adorno, Benjamin and Sigfried Kacauer among others chimes in some ways with anxious and conservative perspectives. Yet this anxiety, and the sophistication of the work of Adorno and Benjamin, provides a promising framework for analysis of this *A City Girl*. Harkness communicates similar anxiety,

¹⁷ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971).

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’ in Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans by Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 17-34 (p.32).

¹⁹ Andrew Hewitt ‘A Feminine Dialectic of Enlightenment? Horkheimer and Adorno Revisited’, *New German Critique*, 56 (1992), 147-164; C.L. Hull, ‘The Need in Thinking: Materiality in Theodor Adorno and Judith Butler’, *Radical Philosophy*, 84 (July-August 1997): 22-35. A number of outstanding and challenging essays can be found in *Adorno: Culture and Feminism*, ed. Maggie O’Neill (London: Sage Publications, 1993).

²⁰ Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body: Corporeality in the Philosophy of T.W. Adorno* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 44.

producing her own sophisticated critique of a nineteenth-century commodity culture which is pervasive enough to shape the vision of its impoverished protagonist.²¹

Margaret Harkness was writing at a time when elite intellectuals and artists were defining themselves against this increasingly visible 'mass' culture, with its connotations of emotionalism and disorder.²² Ideas of the particular vulnerability of women to the incitement of irrationality and desire, to emotional manipulation through exposure to the wrong kind of reading matter and popular, visual pleasure, circulated widely. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, disquiet around 'feminine' reading habits were being recast in the context of an 'evolutionary theory of mind'²³ Women's alleged emotional and physiological vulnerability to reading matter, often framed in terms of physical ingestion, was linked to their supposed proneness to neurasthenia in plush commercial environments such as the department store.²⁴

These notions are both mobilized and contested in the tale of seduction - aesthetic, moral and physical - which *A City Girl* tells: its treatment of commodity fetishism centres on identifiably 'feminine' modes of cultural reception. The novel reformulates, within a Marxian framework, the longstanding assumption that women's manner of reading tended towards the emotional, and that their perusal of the 'wrong' materials could lead to romanticized notions of relations between the sexes, and thus to

²¹ Benjamin, 'Authority and the Family'; Huyssen; Modleski.

²² For perspectives on the mass culture debate, see John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992); Huyssen; Robin Ridless, *Ideology and Art: Theories of Mass Culture from Walter Benjamin to Umberto Eco* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984).

²³ Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: the Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, England: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 63. For key contemporary texts see Katharina Rowold, *Gender and Science: Late Nineteenth-Century Debates on the Female Mind and Body* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996).

²⁴ Andrew Wynter, *The Borderland of Insanity* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1875); Henry Maudsley 'On Some Causes of Insanity', *British Medical Journal*, 2 (1866), 586-90; Thomas Clouston, *Morals and Brain* (London: Cassell & Co., 1912); Sanders, pp. 133-4.

misery and corruption.²⁵ Harkness's narrative draws upon a century-old anxiety that the romance, like other cheap or sham cultural products such as 'finery', promoted inappropriate social and sexual conduct, and rendered obscure women vulnerable to seduction by 'gentlemen.'²⁶ Altogether, *A City Girl* is profoundly troubled by an emerging mass culture, which it casts as deceptive, seductive, an obstacle to political liberation. These elements in the novel inform a bold appeal to the linked, and contrasting, theoretical work of Benjamin, Adorno and Lukács, in the case study which follows.

SUGAR PLUMS, ICONS, NOVELETTES: THE EAST-END DREAMSCAPE

A City Girl is a novel about the enticements of commodity culture and their perceived relationship to the economic and sexual exploitation of one social class by another. In offering a Marxian vision of commercial aesthetics as pacifying, and of mystification as seduction, the novel explores the city in terms of dialectic imagery. It participates in elite anxieties around poorer women's engagement with city aesthetics. It figures the impoverished female body as object of bourgeois lust, and toys with its signification as urban pollutant. Nonetheless, *A City Girl* presents a complex revelatory episode through which social relations are better understood by Nelly and, perhaps, by the imagined reader. The merged myths of democratic material abundance and disinterested class fellowship are simultaneously exploded. A clear and painful social vision is achieved within the novel's central consciousness – that of a working-

²⁵ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fiction* (London: Verso, 1987); see also Felski.

²⁶ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

class woman - at the moment of her subjection to medical-moral regulation and definition as a 'fallen' woman.

In order to tell this story, the narrative fashions a very different East London, in terms of its material and dream relations to the west, than the one fabricated by Walter Besant. As this thesis has discussed, in its anxiety to eradicate middle-class involvement in the production of the East End, Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* depicts east London as a 'great Joyless city' of monotonous streets, separated from the west by a great gulf 'across which no one ever passes' and in which the only place of commercial pleasure is a theatre and a music hall in Whitechapel 'to serve for two millions of people.'²⁷ By contrast, *A City Girl* represents East London as both harsh material environment and as urban dreamscape: the dreamscape is there to sugar-coat the harshness.

The novel stages complex and contradictory conceptions of space. Its heroine Nelly Ambrose lives in a model dwelling. Her home doubles as a shop: her mother and brother vend bon-bons and jam, while Nelly stitches trousers in her adjoining bedroom. The reader is told that the walls of Nelly's room are hung with funeral cards, religious icons, and a piece of mirror which serves as her 'friend and companion' (24). The connections between Nelly's seduction, the superstitions of her Roman Catholic faith and the icons and fictions of commodity culture, extend through the novel.²⁸

While workplace and home are not separated in this economy of sweated labour, the goods in the window are the products of routinized industry, the latest fads

²⁷ Besant, *All Sorts*, p. 50; *ibid*, pp.126-132.

²⁸ For example, the annual Roman Catholic service at the Crystal Palace, the merging of love songs pealing from the barrel-organ with the words of the Roman Catholic Priest's Hail Mary, a pilgrimage to Lourdes and deathbed babblings of mountains and grottoes (13; 19; 91; 138).

and technological innovations: '[O]n a ledge which slanted upwards, were sweets of all sorts and descriptions, toothsome brandy balls, huge peppermints, with appropriate mottoes; green, red, and yellow drops, chocolate, toffee, and new-fangled sugar plums, which have not been christened yet' (23-4). These mass-produced confections, with their repetitive newness, are sweeteners in the drab, administered environment of the building. At the same time they embody, like the model dwellings themselves, an overpowering standardization.²⁹

Whenever she leaves the Charlotte Buildings, Nelly enters a dangerous city of mirrors and projections. Unlike the slither of mirror available to her at home, London's films of commercial glass, embody 'the modern idea of accessibility to all'. Nelly can access her own full-length reflection as she pauses before a display window en route to the market.³⁰ It is through the quintessential figure of woman absorbed at shop window, that the novel begins its dialectic of the material and the spectral, linking the display of inorganic wares to the phantom of degeneration:

She put the basket down for a minute and smoothed the red-brown hair which lay against her low, white forehead. About her face and neck were the blue shadows which usually accompany auburn tresses. Those blue shadows are wonderfully pretty to look at. [...] They fade when the hair loses its gloss, and disappear altogether when their owner sees the first grey hair in the looking-glass. Nelly did not notice the shades or the tints (15).

Nelly is on her way to an East-End market - a routine trip which she experiences as an exciting excursion into visual cultures of consumption, where humble goods, arranged, not under glass but on stalls, can appeal to desire as much as to need. The merchandise ranges from 'long rows of trucks covered with fish, meat, and vegetables' to standardized fancy goods with tones of unwholesomeness, transmitting an omnipresent cultural technology, 'the latest thing out' 'the sweetest

²⁹ Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music'.

³⁰ Friedberg, p. 66; Abelson, p. 68.

thing in feathers, the cheapest thing in lace' (17-18). The narrator asserts that, 'Her mind was completely occupied by the fact that she was going to buy a new feather for her Sunday hat', and that her wish was to 'wear something 'stylish'', to 'look like a lady' (16).³¹ Thus, while it lacks the lustre, the aura, conferred by glass, Nelly associates this unexceptional market display with a prefabricated repertoire of luxury.

On her journey to the market, Nelly has traversed streets suffused with the spaces of empire: brass bands play and sailors dance at the thresholds of pubs and gin-shops. She has taken 'no notice of anybody or anything': she is atomized, sealed inside the dream of a decoration for her hat.³² Her conformist daydreams reside in the image of a 'stylish' feather, which, disembodied, 'floats unencumbered like a multicoloured spirit of the commodity' to an imagined West End, locus of fantasy.³³ In a passage essential to the novel's meaning, the reader is told that,

[T]he sort of lady she admired was the only lady with whom she had ever come in contact, a friend in a West End place of business. To sit on a sofa, to read a novelette, to sip coffee with a teaspoon, to have someone put on and take off her boots, was her idea of being a lady. Her friend only did these things on a Sunday; a real lady did them every day of the week (16-17).

In this fantasy, the pleasurable highlight of Nelly's friend's week is appropriated and repeated across every day. The act of leisured consumption, like the fetishized idea of the 'lady', is abstracted from all productive social relations, becoming a closed and repetitive carousel of sensual highlights.³⁴ In this way the novel establishes, in the midst of humble visual cultures, a misconstrual of class relations absorbed from mass-produced fictions. Clearly the unglamorous lady rent collectors

³¹ Armstrong, pp. 121-122.

³² For the trade in feathers at this time, and the illusion of a democratic sharing of wealth, see Wilson, *Adorned*, pp. 221-223; Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1982), p. 97.

³³ Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, trans. by Robert Bock (Cambridge: Polity, 1982), p. 50; J. Baudrillard, *Seduction* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

³⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, pp. 119-132.

who visit the Charlotte Buildings are not Nelly's idea of ladies (9-11; 125; 73-4). This is because Nelly's notion of a 'lady' is one defined by codified cross-class romance. And significantly, Harkness would repeat this identification of massified romance as generator of dangerous mystifications in her 1888 novel, *Out of Work*. There, an exploited housemaid is rendered oblivious to concrete social phenomena by her consumption of 'dog-eared novelettes' – reading which produces an obsession with all things 'aristocratic.'³⁵

That Harkness articulates Nelly's longing for luxury through the figure of the shopgirl is important. Various critics have explored the popular identification of the fin-de-siècle shopgirl with social mobility, prostitution, and massified urban experience. Moreover, the shopgirl, suspected of reading practices 'symptomatic of her inappropriate longing for pleasure and stimulation,' was associated with the consumption of late-Victorian novelettes. These were distinguished from earlier cheap publications through their relations with fin-de-siècle consumer culture: '[T]heir reliance on the elements of a visually oriented display culture reflective of the spectacular environment of the luxury department store [...] encourag[ed] their readers to consume the merchandise described and depicted in their pages.'³⁶

In Harkness's registration of consumerism as the yearning for lace, feathers and novelettes, Marxist analysis merges with common cultural assumptions. The popular romance, with its image of the female body 'almost a metonymy for capital, for spectacle and for modernity in popular Victorian discourse', is one more element at work in a landscape of fetishes - a 'phantasmagoric city [where] there was a growing

³⁵ John Law [Margaret Harkness] *Out of Work* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1888), p. 145.

³⁶ Sanders, pp. 99-128.

stress upon surface impressions.’³⁷ This concern with the dynamics of commodity fetishism and its structuring of everyday experience is at work as Nelly first encounters her seducer, Arthur Grant, during another outing to purchase modish goods.

Enjoying a visit to Petticoat Lane with her fiancé George, Nelly walks amid industrialized clothes, furniture, and ‘every luxury of the season’ including foreign foods; she admires a window which ‘displayed East End hats and bonnets’ before entering the shop to purchase a feather (30-1). Among the commodities, a placard advertises Arthur Grant as orator: he is an attraction to be viewed at the Radical Club.³⁸ On being persuaded to enter the club’s ‘male’ sphere, Nelly immediately interprets Grant as an improved and more stimulating version of George – ‘so like George in appearance, yet so different’ (35). Harkness takes care to situate Grant within Nelly’s dreamscape of luxuries, and he essentially operates as a fetish, a ‘centre where generalities meet’, signifying ‘those attributes by which he can replace anybody else’.³⁹

Tall and slight with ‘blue eyes, fair hair and a yellow moustache’, Grant encapsulates a certain class and ethnic ideal, his radiant exterior devoid of the marks of labour; he suggests the heroes of romance and melodrama, with their ‘concentration on externals’ and clear moral distinctions.⁴⁰ Indeed, just as the image of the ‘stylish’ feather spearheaded the feather itself, a commercial fiction of the ‘gentleman’ has colonized Nelly in advance of her encounter with Mr Grant. That she switches from gazing at the feather, enveloped in a modest paper bag, to gazing at Grant, underscores

³⁷ Sanders, p. 133. Kay Boardman, ‘A material girl in a material world: the fashionable female body in Victorian women’s magazines’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 3 (1998), 93-110.

³⁸ A placard announces that ‘Mr Arthur Grant would deliver an address that morning on ‘The Future of Radicalism’’ (32).

³⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, pp. 145-155.

⁴⁰ Booth *English Melodrama*, pp.14-15.

his association with the desired objects of commodity culture. He is a standardized confection, 'new fangled' yet instantly recognizable, complete with 'appropriate mottoes' (35).

Two distinct gazes of modernity are produced, and cross, in the space of the political club: while Nelly's eyes are 'fixed upon' his alluring surfaces, Grant is both an aesthetic image sending 'amorous glances' to its consumer, and an elite male consuming Nelly with his gaze: 'He looked at Nelly more than once' (35).⁴¹ Not only does he look rather like Besant's Harry Goslett, a 'slim figure' with a 'pale cheek' and a 'thoroughbred air': Mr Grant's message is much the same (35).⁴² He concludes a speech composed of anti-imperialist sentiments with a socially conservative message. His reference to beef draws the reader's attention away from the feather and back to the 'measly' piece of meat which Nelly purchased the night before: 'Last of all he said a few words against English socialists, and advised his fellow-Radicals to be content with a slice of beef instead of asking for a whole ox' (36).

Mr Grant's association with the cultural project exemplified by Walter Besant's fictional 'People's Palace' is underlined the next time Nelly and he meet. He assures himself that 'with the help of a good tailor, and a little polish, Whitechapel might sit down to dinner in Brook Street' (45). And as Peter Keating observes in his insightful treatment of *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, 'Even the vices of the working man are allowed to be only a form of cultural deficiency. [...A]ll that is needed is a simple lesson in taste and manners.'⁴³ Clearly, *A City Girl* presents a very different economic, sexual, and geographical narrative of class division in London, to the positive vision

⁴¹ Haug, p.50.

⁴² Besant *All Sorts*, p. 9.

⁴³ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 101.

offered by Besant only five years previously. In Harkness's production, impoverished female bodies are endangered not only by the lures of commodity culture and exploitative labour practices, but by the machinations of the cultured male philanthropist, whose image merges with the urban dazzle.

BATTERSEA DREAMING: MYSTIFICATION AT THE ALBERT PALACE

A City Girl's integration of sexual exploitation with commercial seduction is developed in Nelly's next encounter with Grant, which takes place at the commercial dreamhouse of the Albert Palace. This major site of administered pleasure at Battersea Park aimed to provide 'rational amusement and recreation for the public' and its opening in June 1885 was marked by grand ceremony.⁴⁴ Its depiction in the *Illustrated London News*, and its outline on contemporary maps, make apparent the scale of the commercial mirage - vast, enticing, repetitious - which it presented.⁴⁵ An iron and glass structure set in six acres of ornamental gardens, it was promoted in terms of highlights, repetitions, scale for its own sake: a five-hundred-foot nave, a concert hall accommodating more than five thousand people, and an extensive range of refreshment rooms. The Palace was explicitly designed to reproduce the environment and programme of Crystal Palace and other mass leisure venues.⁴⁶

This recycling of cultural goods with slight alterations was typified by the Palace's hosting of the Victoria Cross Gallery, a collection of fifty paintings, executed

⁴⁴ *Illustrated London News* (hereafter *ILN*) 13 June 1885, pp. 597- 605.

⁴⁵ 'Albert Palace at Battersea Park', *ILN*, 28 June 1884, p. 638; *A-Z of Victorian London* p. 48.

⁴⁶ Michael Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For the sheer range of entertainments available at the Crystal Palace in the last years of the nineteenth century and contemporary anxieties over the Palace's vulgarization, see Jan Piggott, *Palace of the People: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham* (London: Hurst and Co., 2004).

by Louis Desanges between 1859 and 1862, depicting actions meriting the Victoria Cross. This same collection had been exhibited at the Crystal Palace in the 1860s and 1870s and, suggests Joany Hichberger, assumed the role of ‘most familiar representations of contemporary war for many middle-class Londoners in the mid-Victorian period’ both through exhibition and through wide circulation in printed media.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the Palace itself exhibited the transience of the commodity, the fragility of glass: failing commercially, it was taken over by William ‘Billy’ Holland, under whose management it presented pantomimes, and acts such as the Jennings Family Acrobats and Fred Ginnette’s Grand Circus.⁴⁸ Holland’s intervention was not successful and by 1888 the Palace was up for sale; after a brief period of dereliction, it was dismantled to make way for Battersea Polytechnic.⁴⁹

That this ambitious leisure facility was demolished within a few years of opening and is now largely forgotten, only points up the spectral element of this episode of *A City Girl* - and the voids and projections which mark the novel as a whole.⁵⁰ In taking her heroine to Battersea Park, Harkness consolidates and extends the assemblage of repressive commercial ephemera - the simultaneous effacement and maintenance of inequality - on which the novel’s early chapters are structured. The

⁴⁷ Adorno ‘On the Fetish Character of Music’; *ILN*, 28 June 1884, p. 638; *Catalogue of the First Series of Historical Pictures by L.W. Desanges, illustrating actions which have won the Victoria Cross* (London: Victoria Cross Gallery, 1859); Michael Barthorp, ‘The Desanges V.C. Paintings’, *Soldiers of the Queen*, 67 (December 1999), 2-6 ; J.W.M. Hichberger, ‘Democratizing Glory? The Victoria Cross Paintings of Louis Desanges’, *Oxford Art Journal*, 7 (1989), 42-51 (p. 42). For the gallery and its exhibits, see *Illustrated London News*, 13 June 1885: 616; *Albert Palace Picture Gallery Descriptive Catalogue 1885* (London: Dunn, Collin & Co., Albert Palace Press, and St Mary Axe, 1885).

⁴⁸ Peter Bailey asserts, ‘The most flamboyant of all the London caterers [i.e. proprietors and agents working in the emerging mass leisure industry], Billy Holland specialized in taking on fading establishments, undertaking expensive renovations and mounting bold new programmes.’ Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.107. For Holland’s importance as proprietor and agent, see *ibid.* Bailey, focusing on Holland’s career in the 1860s and 1870s, does not refer to the Albert Palace episode.

⁴⁹ *Plan of the Albert Palace, Battersea Park: For Sale* (London: Battersea Parish Estates, 1888); *The Metropolitan Borough of Battersea, its Historical Associations, Public Buildings, Open Spaces and Other Features of Interest: Official Guide, 6th edition* (London and Cheltenham: Edward J. Burrow & Co. Ltd., 1938), p. 28.

⁵⁰ For the illustration see ‘Albert Palace at Battersea Park’ *ILN*, 28 June 1884, p. 638. Of the numerous local histories available, only *The Metropolitan Borough of Battersea* mentions the Palace at all.

Albert Palace functions in *A City Girl* as paradigmatic imperial dreamscape, where advertising meets spectacle, where dead, fetishized objects advance a sense of prosperity, progress and national grandeur.⁵¹

Having accompanied her fiancé and his friend Jack to Battersea by steamer - a mode of transport tied in to the marketing of the Albert Palace as a mass leisure experience - Nelly sets about incorporating the park into her dreamworld, a dreamworld previously implicated in glittering and deceptive commercial fictions.⁵² Nelly the east-end trouser-hand practices what Andrew Miller has called, in relation to the seminal display environments of the Crystal Palace and the department store, 'disengaged, solitary and reflective practice'.⁵³ As the group enjoys a picnic, the men talk to one another while Nelly sits, detached in her ongoing fantasy of leisure. The narrative reworks associations of the original Crystal Palace with women's fantasies and unregulated desires.⁵⁴ In this polished commercial realm, the crowd of producers, dressed in Sunday clothes, appear as consumers; the motif of abstracted leisure which characterized Nelly's fantasy of being a 'lady' is repeated: social inequalities are converted into dreamworlds: 'Up and down the river went pleasure steamers towards Kew or Greenwich, with music on board, flags flying, and passengers dressed in their Sunday clothes. Nelly sat with her back to the tree looking at these things, and thinking how pleasant life must be for people who kept perpetual holiday [...] Just then a

⁵¹ *Albert Palace Picture Gallery Descriptive Catalogue*; Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century (1939 Exposé)' in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 14-26 (pp.17-18); Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, pp. 83-92.

⁵² *Descriptive Catalogue*, p.43 (back cover).

⁵³ Andrew H. Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), pp. 57-8.

⁵⁴ Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

gentleman came up the path' (41-2).⁵⁵ The significance of Mr Grant's appearance at this moment of passive enchantment cannot be overemphasized. In walking through Battersea Park, Arthur Grant walks into Nelly's fantasy.

Grant constitutes a dominant figure of modernity, 'a man walking, as if alone' in the metropolis.⁵⁶ His presence at the Park is consistent with his occasional journalism and his persona as one who 'had come to the end of everything, who had experienced (so far as he was able) all sensations' (176). This mobile, discerning and largely anonymous engagement with the city's places of commercial exchange and social mixing expresses a mode of experience akin to *flânerie*: Grant moves through the dreamscape with his hat 'tilted a little in front', his coat open to reveal his waistcoat (42). Nelly recognizes Arthur Grant. Her gaze, 'imbued with the exchange value of commodities', finds him in the act of raising his eyeglass.⁵⁷ But as the novel will suggest, the leisured gentleman so admired by Nelly is a chimera.

It is just possible that the text's repeated references to Grant's monocle make caustic allusion to Joseph Chamberlain, the Birmingham-based political titan with whom Beatrice Webb had an unhappy relationship during the mid-1880s. That Mr Grant is represented at large in a popular pleasure resort by no means rules out an association with Chamberlain.⁵⁸ And as José Harris has observed, '[To many people, Chamberlain] sounded like a liar and looked like a cad [...] His monocle, cigars, orchids, abrasive speech and flamboyant/bordering-on-the-vulgar taste in dress,

⁵⁵ Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, pp. 81-2; Scott McCracken, *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction and the Urban Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.90.

⁵⁶ Williams, *The Country*, p. 233.

⁵⁷ Benjamin 'Exposé of 1939', p. 18.

⁵⁸ Michael Diamond 'Political Heroes of the Victorian Music Hall', *History Today*, 40 (1990), 30-39.

houses, food and entertainment all marked him down as not quite a gentleman.’⁵⁹ The eighteen months preceding the publication of *A City Girl* had seen Chamberlain’s move from radical Liberal, to Liberal Unionist situated in an awkward, defensive alliance with the Conservative Party.⁶⁰ Harkness’s next novel, *Out of Work* (1888), would accuse Chamberlain of deceiving and betraying the working classes: there he appears as fallen icon, one whose image, in the form of a publicity photograph, is literally faded and soiled.⁶¹ Harkness may be making the same point, albeit obliquely, in *A City Girl*. Arthur Grant, monocled man-about-town, avowed radical Liberal, sits down with working men George and Jack, distributes cigars and discusses the Irish Question. But his true motives for doing so are hidden and dishonourable: he seeks sexual access to Nelly (42-43).

Though both Grant and Nelly are inscribed by urban visual cultures, they experience the Park very differently. Arthur Grant’s elite aesthetic sense is quickly established - in terms of egotistical vapidty. While to Nelly’s naïve gaze the Palace’s ornamental waters look ‘like a picture in a book’, to Grant the scene appears ‘very commonplace.’ This being a pleasure zone which ‘structure[s] sexuality within a classed order,’ Grant appraises Nelly’s face and figure, thinking her ‘like a picture herself’ and ‘unlike the [East End girls] he had come across in the hospital, in the streets, and places of amusement’ (44).⁶² So far as he is concerned, Nelly, like the disconnected novelties of Battersea Park, lacks meaningful content: though she reminds him of a painting once viewed in a gallery, this free-floating image is

⁵⁹ José Harris, ‘Book Review: In Search of the Nearly Man’ *Independent on Sunday*, 21 August 1994 <<http://independent.co.uk/entertainment/book-review-in-search-of-the-nearly-man-joseph-chamberlain-entrepreneur-in-politics-by-peter-t-marsh-yale-pounds-30-1384950.html>>. Harris is reviewing Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁶⁰ P. Fraser, ‘The Liberal Unionist Alliance: Chamberlain, Hartington and the Conservative 1880-1904’, *The English Historical Review*, 77 (1962), 53-78.

⁶¹ Law [Harkness], *Out of Work*, pp. 58- 66.

⁶² Pollock, p. 70.

immediately absorbed into the surrounding kitsch and its underlying structures of exploitation. By contrast, Nelly's response to this looking-glass realm is shaped by mass-produced fictions, and by her thirst for escape from the harsh everyday:

Mr Grant led the way to the Café Chantant and ordered tea [...] As Nelly sat there eating cake, and listening to the music, she felt in Paradise; work and trouble were forgotten [...] sweaters and trousers became things of the past. [...] She was fond of George, but he was not the ideal lover she had dreamed about [...] The ideal lover had long white fingers and a diamond ring [...] His voice was softer than George; his clothes had a better fit (47-49).

Gerd BiØrhovde is right to draw from this that '[T]he city girl values 'form above content', appearance above character.'⁶³ At the site of commercial splendour, consuming cake, music, the spectacle of 'mermaids', Nelly believes she has glimpsed the 'Paradise' of which all manufactured icons are the representation. The reader may be reminded of Guy Debord's assertion that the principle of commodity fetishism, Guy Debord finds its consummation in commercial spectacle, 'where the perceptible world is replaced by a set of images that are superior to that world, yet at the same time impose themselves as *eminently* perceptible.'⁶⁴ And Harkness suggests that scepticism and surrender are simultaneously at work in this reception of massified culture.⁶⁵ In the corrupting haze of marketed pleasures, Nelly is aware of and complicit in her own illusions. And the narrator's employment of the language of dream and enslavement is at its most explicit where enchantment ends. Grant's otherworldly presence extends and intensifies Nelly's fantasy; George, her fiancé, disrupts it:

She was rudely awakened from her dream by George, who took out his watch and declared that it was time to go home. [...] Nelly's lip quivered. [...] The spell was broken. Paradise disappeared at the sight of the dusty road, and the real world, with all its hardships and difficulties, resumed its thrall over her senses, its hold upon her thoughts and feelings, as they entered the Park (47-48).

⁶³ BiØrhovde, p. 79.

⁶⁴ Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, p. 26, emphasis in original.

⁶⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays – the Irrational in Culture*, ed. by Stephen Crook (London: Routledge, 1993).

The Park's ersatz delights atomize the individual and delude as to class relations. '[O]nce, when their eyes met, [Grant] smiled, as though he understood exactly what she was feeling, and sympathised with her disappointment' (48). This smile, misinterpreted, is the desiring prelude to exploitation and abandonment. The episode underlines Nelly's vulnerability to mystifying spectacle, to ruinous manipulation and desire - and Mr Grant's association with the fleeting, the superficial and the purely personal. Here, in fairyland, east and west meet, but fail to connect with one another, or with social process.

'SOAPY STUFF': MELODRAMA AND SEDUCTION IN EAST LONDON

Nelly's next encounter with Arthur Grant organizes the threat of capitalist-sexual seduction around the ingestion of melodrama, a cultural form which the narrative depicts as hollow and mechanized, but which it nonetheless frames as cryptic trial of perception and experience. The broad relevance of melodrama to *A City Girl*, which tells the 'old, old story, the proletarian girl seduced by a middle-class man', is obvious enough.⁶⁶ As Martha Vicinus and Judith Walkowitz have shown, forms of melodrama had long been deployed in radical discourses – the figure of aristocratic seducer remaining central to the rhetoric of the Late-Victorian social purity movement (67).⁶⁷ In her appraisal of the 'melodramatic mode' as hostile and productive response to market practices, Elaine Hadley asserts, '[T]he melodramatic mode's inclusive and deferential model of social organisation threatened both the values of the liberal elite

⁶⁶ Engels, 'Letter to Margaret Harkness', p. 90.

⁶⁷ Martha Vicinus 'Helpless and Unfriended': Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama', *New Literary History* 13 (1981-2), 127-143; Walkowitz, *City*, pp. 85-102; Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), chapter 5. See also Kirsten Guest, 'Victorian Melodrama and the Performance of Poverty' in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27 (1999), 443-56.

and their social value in Victorian culture, despite – or perhaps because of – melodrama’s affiliation with women and the poor.’⁶⁸ As I shall show, Harkness employs melodrama and the theatre’s heterosocial space within her narrative to disclose class distinctions - and their relations to east and west as abstract and concrete space.

Nelly is invited to the theatre when Mr Grant chances upon her looking into a shop window. As she gazes distractedly at commercial displays and entertainments, Nelly, it is suggested, finds the streets more welcoming than her own home – the ‘stuffy shop and bedroom’ - not as the loitering flâneuse but as exhausted worker who has been ‘hard at work bending over her machine, finishing off long rows of stitches’ and ‘sorely wanted a little diversion, a little amusement.’ (61-2). A slow motion and lingering at windows here, and elsewhere in *A City Girl*, signals moral and physical danger: ‘She walked slowly, looking into the shop windows as she went, stopping to listen every now and then to a hurdy-gurdy, or to watch an acrobat performing tricks’ (61). In a detail subtly suggestive of Nelly’s interest in books, she tries to read the title of a volume in the bookshop window. The book is ‘bright blue’ – a colour associated throughout the text both with George the caretaker and with Arthur Grant.⁶⁹ It is at this moment that Grant emerges from the interior of the shop to ask where Nelly is going.

Grant thus issues from the pages of a book (mass-produced romance) and from a place of commercial display and exchange (the bookshop itself). The narrator is careful to emphasize the point: Mr Grant ‘had faded from her memory, had become

⁶⁸ Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics*, p. 184; see also *ibid*, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁹ The Blue Book is also a parliamentary report of the kind which middle-class social and cultural missionaries might well consult.

mixed up with the ideal, nameless lover who played so great a part in her thoughts' (63). Nelly's exhaustion results in a sanguine response to this chance encounter, a coincidence typical in itself of the plotline of the novelette. Her exhaustion also results in a vulnerability to Grant's advances: 'Nelly longed for a little change before she set about a new batch of trousers. Her mind was weary, so weary she took it almost as a matter of course that Mr Grant should happen to be in the bookseller's when she paused to look in at the window' (62-63).⁷⁰ It is unsurprising that the overworked Nelly is persuaded to accompany Grant on a pleasure-trip.

Grant and Nelly attend a nearby theatre where, as at the Albert Palace, leisured consumption is impressed upon the patrons' bodies – the audience appearing 'with a holiday-look on their faces'. (64). The social stratification of the phantasmagoria is, however, clarified. Much to Nelly's delight, she is whisked up to a private box where she feels 'like a 'lady' for the first time in her life' (65). The narrator binds the reawakening of Nelly's passion for Arthur Grant both to her transient occupation of highly-decorated, high-status space, and to her immersion in the sensual delights of the theatre's neo-romantic musical fare: 'Mr Grant began to whistle the music, and, hearing him, Nelly became conscious of a strange exhilaration, her feet kept time to the waltz. She looked at him, and quick as lightning came back the thoughts and feelings he had awakened a fortnight before, which for two weeks had lain dormant with the ideal lover' (65). It is in this sequence that the narrator's anxiety regarding the evacuation of dialectical relations from standardized, sensation-abundant cultural forms is made explicit.

⁷⁰ For the formulaic chance encounter in the novelette, see Flint *The Woman Reader*, p. 160.

The narrator emphasises the automatic succession of operations characteristic of melodrama, the gloss obscuring its decayed form. As Michael Booth has stated, in melodrama, ‘Themes, situations, and character types repeat themselves endlessly [...] These are truly characteristic, but what is really more important is the pattern into which they fit, a pattern giving what appears on the surface to be wildly chaotic and exceedingly trivial drama a logical moral and philosophical coherence.’⁷¹ *A City Girl* breaks melodrama down into so many manufactured and coincidental elements: ‘The virtuous wife was forced, to shield the honour of her mother, to become the victim of a secret by reason of which her brother appeared as her lover and was shot by her enraged husband’ (66-7). This ‘strange hocus-pocus of events’, with its rich stock of effects and paucity of structure, has been assembled in order to thrill and manipulate. Harkness figures melodrama as the ultimate in fragmented, repetitious, formulaic produce. Combining radicalism with nostalgia and deference, it is ‘old-fashioned, traditionally individual, decayed and romantic’ – an embodied decomposition, an atomization.⁷²

Nelly’s proximity to the ‘West’, whether manifested in the West End actors, their ludicrous representations of high society, or the close physical presence of Arthur Grant, is, in important senses, mystical. She is oblivious to the true relations of power, the social essence which both pervades and hides within these physical and notional spaces; she misunderstands the class divisions which the spatial divisions of the theatre replicate. Even Nelly’s enjoyment of an ice cream – ‘some soapy stuff wrapt in paper, and a bit of paste’ – is characterized as synthetic, poisonous. For the theatre is incubator of modernity’s contamination – a place of moral and organic risk. And

⁷¹ Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins: 1965), pp. 5-14.

⁷² Witkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture*, p. 64. Kirsten Guest, ‘Are You Being Served? Cannibalism, Class, and Victorian Melodrama’, in Kirsten Guest (ed.), *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 107-128.

endangered Nelly thinks the actresses, associated in the cultural imaginary with prostitution, 'wonderful.' Again, BiØrhovde offers an insightful reading, asserting that, because 'red velvet may after all as easily be associated with the brothel as with the palace', the scene in the theatre box suggests carnality.⁷³

Where Besant's Harry Goslett practised upon the seamstress Nelly Sorensen and other needlewomen a 'manly seizure by the waist' motivated by 'frank' and 'brotherly' affection, to a music prompting 'noble sympathy', *this* elite philanthropist puts his arm around Nelly's waist as prelude to seduction (66).⁷⁴ He embodies the exploitative class and gender relations which commodity spectacle works to obscure, and his fetishistic vacuity, expressed by his continuing assessment of Nelly as 'a picture worth looking at', inheres both in his status as hollowed-out massified image and in his collapse inwards as late-Victorian bourgeois consciousness. Like the aesthetes drawn by Annie Besant in her attack on the shareholders of Bryant in May, Grant is in thrall to commodity culture and its complicity in both the exploitation of the poor and the commodification of the aesthetic. Notably, during the account of a subsequent day trip along the Thames, Grant muses on his ambition to write a novel featuring 'some curious psychological studies.' This novel will have no plot, as 'plots had gone out since the time of Thackeray and George Eliot' (75). Arthur Grant, then, writes the self - his own self - as liquefied into ephemeral states, relegating the external world to a kaleidoscope of effects. Nelly appears to him 'no psychological study [...] only something pretty to look at,' the freefloating, sexualized likeness of a dead, flat artefact: 'like Pharoah's daughter with a look of awe on her face' (75-6).

⁷³ BiØrhovde p.71.

⁷⁴ Besant, *All Sorts*, pp. 93; *ibid*, p. 190.

It is difficult to argue with Seth Koven's conclusion that, 'In Harkness's writings [...] altruism is merely a convenient cover for the expression of erotic desires.'⁷⁵ But the analysis offered by *A City Girl* goes much deeper than this: it seeks to reveal the destructive workings of commodity fetishism. Like Nelly Ambrose, Arthur Grant is written as an individual blind to the historical-social forces which produce him. No more than Nelly does he grasp social process. But it is Nelly, the proletarian heroine, the most susceptible and abject victim of mass culture's mystifications, who will pierce illusion and emerge from insensibility.

**PROJECTION AND EXCLUSION IN KENSINGTON:
NELLY WAKES UP**

In his discussion of modernity, David Harvey highlights what he calls 'the terrible confusions and oppositions [...] the growing sense of crisis in the experience of time and space' which accumulated during the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁷⁶ In its humble way, the chapter of *A City Girl* entitled 'East and West', in which Nelly's worst suspicions regarding Arthur Grant are confirmed, plays with a set of contradictory and troubling experiences of time and space in late-Victorian London. For the text excludes Nelly violently, at the moment 'true' socio-economic relations are revealed, from one particular manifestation of what Harvey has called 'space-time compression' - the rapid access between West and East offered by London's increasingly sophisticated public transport systems.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 168.

⁷⁶ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 266.

⁷⁷ Ibid: chapter seven.

Learning where Arthur Grant lives, Nelly walks from the Charlotte's Buildings, through twilit streets to Mansion House station. From here she accesses London's underground railway, taking a third-class carriage to West Kensington. The Metropolitan District Railway, on which she travels, had connected Mansion House to West Kensington since the 1870s. During the 1880s the Inner Circle and the Hammersmith and City Railway contributed to a spatial and symbolic reconfiguration, in which London was 'connected' from Whitechapel to Windsor.⁷⁸

On arriving at West Kensington, Nelly walks slowly along a residential street which 'slants to the west', and looks in 'at all the uncovered windows, straining her eyes to see if they had any occupants' (96). Moving through falling snow, she has changed greatly since the moment of her introduction, standing before the looking-glass window of an east London shop. Then she had appeared with 'the blue shadows of her complexion so wonderfully pretty to look at' (15). At West Kensington, however, she resembles a classic figure from popular melodrama, spurned by her family and left 'exhausted in the snow in the heartless city', as she halts 'before each uncovered window to continue her scrutiny. Her face was very pale; her hazel eyes looked careworn and anxious' (96-97).⁷⁹

Stopping short before a bow window, Nelly gazes into its illuminated interior at 'a gentleman' and two children: 'The children lay on the hearthrug listening to what the gentleman was reading [...] She leant forward, and into her eyes came a hungry look; while she watched her face grew older' (97). When Mrs Grant, her voluminous

⁷⁸ These are now the London Underground's District, Circle and Hammersmith and City lines. See *The Spread of London's Underground: Changes to the London Underground Network From its Beginnings in 1863* (Harrow: Capital Transport, 2004), pp. 6-9; Christian Wolmar, *The Subterranean Railway: How the London Underground Was Built and How it Changed the City Forever* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), pp. 70-92.

⁷⁹ Booth, *English*, p. 24.

wrapper contrasting with Nelly's shawl, enters and hands a baby to the man, Nelly is able to see Arthur Grant's face, and discerns a difference between the way he looks at the baby and the way he looked at Nelly during their liaison. She interprets in this an authenticity of private and emotional looking, and Grant's world as one 'shut in by the golden gates of domestic happiness' (99-100). Again, it is Gerd BiØrhovde who has provided the richest reading of what she calls 'the most crucial scene in the novel' in its articulation of social and geographical gulf. She recognizes that the episode has a 'commercial quality':

There is a suggestion of something approaching a window display in the scene, in fact not unlike the several other scenes in the novel where Nelly looks into the shop windows at the merchandise displayed or at the reflection of her own pretty image. The Grant family, too, is as it were on display, living up to and 'advertising' the myth of family happiness, so essential to bourgeois ideology.⁸⁰

Indeed, the incident at West Kensington constitutes Harkness's symptomatic urban scene, locating the 'old, old story' of cross-class seduction (exploitation) within the modern city of reflections, distractions and deceptions.⁸¹ Nelly is positioned passively in the darkness of the street, where she is subjected to a luminous and mystical projection. The projection suggests the illuminated scenes of theatre, the Roman Catholic shrine, the merchandising reliquaries of the exhibition, the arcade, the shop, and a range of optical illusions bound up with the redefinition of the gaze in the modern city. Devouring the image which the window presents, Nelly is as vulnerable and voracious as any imagined lady shopper in Regent Street or the rue de Sèvres; but in her suffering marginality, Nelly presents a travesty of the moneyed female consumer so beloved of cultural historians. This West London window is for her a site of 'hungry' looking, speaking both to Nelly's needs and her desires, to her stomach – in the sense of physical appetite and of her pregnancy - and to delusion.

⁸⁰ BiØrhovde, p. 73.

⁸¹ See also Law, *Out of Work*, pp. 51-2.

As she grows 'older' at the site of illusion, Nelly contrasts with the posture of decorporealized and anonymous subjectivity often ascribed to the flâneur. The darkness may, for a moment, afford Nelly the privilege of unseen spectatorship in the city of modernity, but there is nothing detached about the gaze with which she assesses the bourgeois interior. Yet in the course of this scene, the narrator presents a second, rather intriguing, figure in opposition to that of authoritative male observer. Nelly's pained withdrawal behind a stone pillar deprives her of a sight which the narrator asserts would have 'astonished' her: a bored and dissatisfied Arthur Grant comes to the window, wonders what's for supper, whether to go to his club, and yawns (99). Thus Arthur Grant may be read as 'an embodiment of the special blend of excitement, tedium and horror aroused by many in the new metropolis and the disintegrative effect of this on the masculine identity.'⁸² Grant experiences no 'violence of scopic control, [or] visceral desire' at this window: he looks not outward, but inward.⁸³ 'Whitechapel knows nothing of metempsychosis,' asserts the narrator (99). There is no stable, intact Arthur Grant. He is a series of mental states and desires, a banal, alienated man 'caught up in the violent dislocations that characterized urbanization.'⁸⁴ The novel he plans, all psychological study and no plot, is indeed 'the epitome of Arthur Grant' (99; 75).

Yet this bourgeois domestic window is more illuminating than misleading. For all that she partially misreads the scene, Nelly is jolted out of her misconceptions regarding the West End 'gentleman' and the relations between them. The mass-produced notion of 'ideal lover' is revealed as the hollow into which a 'ruined' and discarded woman has poured prefabricated emotions. The smooth surfaces of

⁸² Wilson 'Invisible', p. 109.

⁸³ Armstrong, p. 115.

⁸⁴ Wilson, 'Invisible', p. 109.

commercial spectacle are fractured; Nelly penetrates social phenomena, in however rudimentary fashion; the glittering surface is not reality.⁸⁵ The description of the shutters closing underscores a sense of the interior scene as projection, evocative of commercial light shows: ‘The next time Nelly looked at the window she found the shutters closed and the picture she had been watching vanished into darkness. Slowly, very slowly, she left the spot, and walked back to the station. As she went she seemed to see Mr Grant’s face bending over the baby.’ (99)

Nelly, as Arthur Grant’s illicit secret, stands in contrast to the bourgeois interior. The theme is developed. As she returns to the station, Nelly finds that her ticket and purse have disappeared. The reader is told that, ‘forlorn and forsaken’, Nelly feels ‘how far, how very far, the East is from the West.’ She realizes that, ‘Whitechapel may talk to Kensington, and Kensington may shake hands with Whitechapel, but between them there is a great gulf fixed, the thought of which made her head ache and her heart sink’ (100). And this newly-perceived distance between east and west is more than notional. Her speedy outward journey by rail delivered a sense of east and west as connected, the space between dispersed through acceleration. Nelly’s disillusionment coincides with the loss of her purse: it is ‘a long way to walk’ home (101). As Ana Vadillo discusses, in the course of the nineteenth century, the city’s expanding transportation systems, though emancipatory for many women, transformed London into a commodity, space into a consumable.⁸⁶ Without her purse, however, Nelly is excluded from the connecting technologies of modernity. It is just such rationalizing technologies, positioning her in ‘collectivity and simultaneously

⁸⁵ Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*, p. 182.

⁸⁶ Vadillo, *Passengers of Modernity*, pp.28-30.

separated in absorptive solitude' which have mystified the relations between classes, between 'east' and 'west', during the first half of the novel.⁸⁷

Yet this Nelly, grown 'older', with her transformed understanding of social and spatial division, is at the centre of modernity, as surely as she was when sitting enraptured at the dreamworld of the Albert Palace. Drawn finally from enchantment, she experiences the city as fragmented, menacing, assailing. This is a different 'gulf' to that described by Besant, in which east stands in pristine and mysterious estrangement from the normative west. It is instead the alienated world created by the reality of class relations. Moving through the city's labyrinthine and callous crowd, Nelly experiences not the flâneuse's gaze of distraction, the dreamlike reverie of the affluent consumer, but disorientation, exhaustion. In this unfamiliar district of anonymous multiplication, the roads appear 'all alike' and the snow falls steadily.

At the moment she enters this enlightened estrangement, Nelly is treated as unwanted 'leakage' from the 'nether regions' of society into West Kensington. Embodying 'the double relation women held in the nineteenth century to the new consumer culture,' Nelly moves from surreptitious spectator of the bourgeois interior to emblem of metropolitan poverty, 'conduit of infection', a 'logo of a divided city' highlighting 'the class structure and general social distribution of London.'⁸⁸

Approaching a man for money towards her return fare, she is accused by a policeman of drunkenness and of soliciting. And just as seminal fluids mingled within the body of the prostitute, threatening social distinctions, breaching 'the carefully-constructed

⁸⁷ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Boston: MIT Press, 2000), p. 370.

⁸⁸ May Louise Roberts, 'Gender, Consumption and Commodity Culture', *The American Historical Review* 13:3 (1998), 817-844 (p. 818): Roberts is referring to the kleptomaniac and the prostitute. Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, p. 4; Walkowitz, *City*, p. 21.

boundaries between the pure and the fallen', so Nelly's body carries the baby which she and Arthur Grant have made together.⁸⁹ In the latter stages of the novel, it is the fate of this baby which serves to figure the horror of class exploitation and disconnection in a city transformed in Nelly's eyes, both by Grant's abandonment of her, and by her own status as unmarried mother.

A NEW CITY: THE WINDOWS OF DEATH IN *A CITY GIRL*

Prior to the episode outlining Nelly's experiences in Kensington, the text of *A City Girl* maps a simultaneous effacement and maintenance of social inequality through the city's emerging mass cultures. The display window plays a key role in this social deception. Significantly, in the second half of the novel, Nelly's experience of helplessness and sexual shame is also articulated through a series of interactions with windows - but these interactions now lack any element of romance or glamour. For example, having been abused and rejected by the sweater's wife because of her 'fallen' status, Nelly can find no cards advertising for needlewomen. Whereas, the previous year, when a number of such cards had been displayed in commercial windows, Nelly had felt 'so independent', she now feels 'hopeless' and 'desperate' (108). When she returns home from a fruitless search for work, her mother and brother, both of whom the text depicts as repulsive, are conferring at the shop window. Her brother then attacks Nelly with a stick and drives her from her home into 'vacant space' outside the model dwellings (109). Subsequently, she works feverishly to support her baby, in conditions destructive to the health of mother and child.

⁸⁹ Nead, *Myths* p. 115.

The narrative of her baby's degeneration and death is interspersed by representations of windows linked with impoverishment, class division and false comfort. The stifling chemist's shop Nelly attends for medicines, where 'the sun beat through a closed window', hosts hundreds of 'lean-looking' flies which 'fed on pills and powders and lived among surgical instruments' (147). The interior of the hospital where Nelly takes her baby, described by the narrator as 'quite an aristocratic place', reminds Nelly of luxury displays of toys, seen previously in shop windows – a parallel that underscores both the bodily horrors which are veiled by urban dazzle, and the humiliations of class patronage:

The room seemed to her very like a large doll's house, such as she had seen in West End shop windows. [...] Everything in the room was perfect [...] Children played with costly toys sent from Royal nurseries, and looked at picture-books made up by West End ladies. Everything was pretty to look at except the little suffering faces in some of the cots, pleasant to hear but for the cries of pain that came from a few cradles (157).

The illuminated windows of the city now signify death. Taking shelter during a stormy night in a shed near the hospital, Nelly fixes on one bright window in the hospital as site and sign of her baby's recovery (163). When, surrounded rising by water, Nelly fears she is vulnerable to masculine assault, she banishes her fears by fixing her eyes on the lamp of the hospital and saying an Ave Maria (165). But on attending the hospital, she finds her baby dead, lifeless as a doll, in the aesthetically-pleasing mortuary: 'If death could be rendered lovable, that little mortuary would have made mourners love life's great enemy, instead of hating it [...] upon the walls flowers and grass, corn and poppies, scarlet berries covered with hoar frost, were painted [...]' The child was like wax- so exquisitely delicate, so marble-like' (167-9). Nelly has already shown indifference to the arrival of a 'great lady' at the hospital, demonstrating the disillusionment and anxiety which now dominate her experience of the city (155). Now, following the death of her baby, Nelly's grief and disillusionment

result in physical assault upon a 'lady' nurse as, her bonnet falling from her head, she shows the nurse 'what it is to be an East-End mother' (169). Here, Nelly is completing her social-aesthetic education: this is Margaret Harkness's version of 'discontent' advanced through aesthetic revelation.

Nelly's baby is not the only fictional infant referred to in the course of this thesis. Chapters seven and eight explore in-depth other images of weak urban babies appearing in a number of fin-de-siècle fictions - babies associated with synthetic, organic and social threat. But now, as I turn to George Gissing's *The Nether World*, my focus continues to be the display-window. For Gissing represents a London-wide culture of commercial toxicity producing instances of pathology and bodily horror which are - in their own way - dazzling.

Chapter Six

GEORGE GISSING'S SPECTACULAR NETHER WORLD

Feminist criticism of the work of the novelist George Gissing, with his uniquely rich and ambivalent treatment of fin-de-siècle female mobility, has tended to focus on his 'suburban' novels of the 1890s - *The Odd Women* (1893), *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), *Eve's Ransom* (1895) and *The Whirlpool* (1897) - with their streetwalking bourgeois heroines: shopgirls, businesswomen, musicians, determined metropolitan pleasure seekers. Such scholarship has generated radical and productive alternatives to the male bourgeois model of the urban stroller.¹ However, as Emma Liggins points out in her historicized (re)assessment of Gissing's treatment of the working woman in the city: '[T]his trend in criticism has helped to perpetuate the myth that these new gendered subjectivities, glossed by Lynda Nead in her study of mid-Victorian London as 'a new transgressive form of metropolitan femininity', were primarily apparent in the middle classes, and thus embodied by the middle-class emancipated heroine.'²

Moreover, in his study of the emergence of new urban masculinities in the literature of modernity, Scott McCracken, a cultural materialist informed by a wide range of critical methodologies, accuses key Marxist critics of having 'closed down the dreamscapes hidden in [Gissing's] drab urban scenes.' Among these critics is John Goode, who posits a class-defined zoning of the city in Gissing's work which resembles the mapping of socio-economic boundaries in Charles Booth's sociologic

¹ See my Introduction for discussion of the possibility of a flâneuse (female urban stroller) in the Victorian city.

² Liggins *George Gissing*, p.xxxiv; Liggins is quoting Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p.67. The work of Liggins, Ledger, and Chialant follows that of Wilson in suggesting radical alternatives to the model of anonymous male bourgeois flâneur: Sally Ledger, 'Gissing, the Shopgirl, and the New Woman', *Women: A Cultural Review* 6:3 (Winter 1995), 263-74; Maria Theresa Chialant, 'The Feminization of the City in Gissing's Fiction: The Streetwalker, the Flâneuse, the Shopgirl' in *A Garland for Gissing*, ed. by Bouwe Postmus (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp.51-65.

survey *Inquiry into the Life and Labour of the People in London*.³ Recent Gissing studies, alert to the emerging commodity cultures of fin-de-siècle London, have promoted a dialogue between forms of fragmentation in Gissing's fictional metropolis, and the more dynamic configurations which have emerged in recent interdisciplinary scholarship on urban mobility.⁴

In contributing to these debates, I focus on *The Nether World*'s representations of the fantasies and practices of consumption and self-display of contrasting London work girls, and their engagement with London's emerging commercial and heterosocial spaces. In the reading which follows, the city of *The Nether World* is simultaneously a place of production and of consumption – or, of the fantasy of consumption. While the geography of the novel is certainly marked by slums and equally horrifying 'improvements' such as model dwellings, the denizens of this allegedly 'non-human' 'crepuscular world' are familiar with spectacular spaces and exhibition culture, with entertainment venues where pleasurable experience is for sale.⁵ Whether frequenting, toiling within, or suffering exclusion from, such spaces, a number of young women are depicted indulging in fantasies of geographical and sensual escape from an 'intractable' world of constriction and privation.⁶ Such fantasies are consistently linked to sites of phantasmagoric exhibition.

³ Scott McCracken, *Masculinities*, p.90; Charles Booth's work and methods are discussed at more length in chapter four of this thesis.

⁴ Luisa Villa, 'Gissing's Saturnalia: Urban Crowds, Carnavalesque Subversion and the Crisis of Paternal Authority' in *Gissing and the City: Cultural Crisis and the Making of Books in Late-Victorian England* ed. by John Spiers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp.63-74; David Glover, "'This Spectacle of the World's Wonder': Commercial Culture and Urban Space in Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee*" in *A Garland*, ed. by Buowe Postmus, pp.137-151; Margaret E. Mitchell, "'Children of the Street': Reconfiguring Gender in Gissing's London' in *Gissing and the City* ed. by John Spiers, pp. 129-138; Michelle Allen, *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008)

⁵ Allen *Cleansing*, p.154; John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* (London, Vision 1978), p.92; John Goode, 'George Gissing's *The Nether World*' in *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, ed. by David Howard, John Lucas and John Goode (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) pp. 207-241 (p.211).

⁶ Goode, *George Gissing*, p. 100.

This chapter does more than argue that the city of *The Nether World* is punctuated by sites of commercial display. It builds upon the careful work undertaken thus far in this thesis to unpack common cultural connections between the commodity, urban contagion and bodily horror. In the following reading, Gissing's rich slum fiction of 1889 presents an exemplary narrative of aesthetic contagion. Exposure to commercial spectacle is figured as medical-moral corruption: female desire is pathological, mobility and spectacle contaminate. The body of the working-class female proves perilously reactive to urban aesthetics, figured mainly by the glittering display window - vector of seduction, contagion and death. Gissing also treats his readers to a graphic representation of Woman degrading, body and soul, in the perverting glare of the bar room. But more than this, this chapter develops the range of cultural and psychoanalytical connections made in earlier chapters to disclose the ways in which Woman as vampire-medusa stalks the streets of Gissing's Clerkenwell. Susan J. Navarette's reflection on fin-de-siècle texts of decadence applies equally to the text of *The Nether World*: '[T]he body-as-text analogy central to the writings of evolutionists and anthropologists emerges in many turn-of-the-century horror stories, which express the pervasive fear that the otherwise pleasant-looking body might camouflage 'horrors,' spiritual and material'⁷ Indeed, the novel's anxieties and strategies of containment regarding feminine autonomy, consumerism and urban disease, are such that - as I argue - it stands among those diverse and important texts of the fin de siècle in which women's engagement with modernity is pathologized, hystericized, represented in terms of material-sexual desire, worrying passivity and terrifying voracity.

⁷ Navarette, p.5.

THE WINDOWS OF MODERNITY: DESIRING CORRUPTION

In *The Nether World*, a woman's exposure to urban aesthetics marks the onset of the commodification of her body and the onset of pathology, addiction and delusion.

Central to the text's representation of these processes are women's responses to a set of display windows. The relationship between a window displaying photographs of the commodified forms of actresses, and that of a public bar in Islington, make for perhaps the most sophisticated examples in the book. These particular windows feature in the urban adventures of Clara Hewett, an ambitious young woman who moves into London's service industry at the level of barmaid despite the concerns of her father and her admirer, Sidney Kirkwood. Taking a bar job in Islington constitutes her first practical step towards her secret ambition to be an actress - a profession popularly associated with prostitution and 'further compromised by any association with the New Woman and her philosophy of sexual self-determination.'⁸ Furthermore, the role of barmaid, in common with that of actress, has been identified by Peter Bailey as a 'glamorous embodiment of a distinct form of modernity – parasexuality [... the] practice of managed arousal.'⁹ The figures of the actress, the barmaid and the shop girl were associated with artificiality both through a muddying of class origins – a form of social disruption bound up with the crossing of spatial boundaries – and through their role in commercial exchange, supposedly 'fascinated and attracted by urban spectacle' yet among the 'manipulators' of that spectacle.¹⁰

⁸ Gardner, Viv, 'Introduction', in *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre 1850-1914*, ed. by Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford (London: Harvester, 1992), pp. 1-14 (p. 7). For the association between the actress and the prostitute see Davis, pp. 69-103.

⁹ Peter, Bailey 'Parasexuality and Glamour: The Victorian Barmaid as Sexual Prototype', *Gender and History* 2 (1990), 148-72 (pp.150-2).

¹⁰ Sanders, pp.19-54; Ledger, 'Gissing', p. 270; Elizabeth Evans, "'Counter-jumpers' and 'Queens of the Street': The Shop Girl of Gissing and his Contemporaries' in *Gissing and the City*, ed. by John Spiers, pp.109-117; Parsons p.50; Bailey 'Parasexuality', p.163. However, any such manipulation can be read as limited: Liggins, 'Her Appearance', p. 38.

As Clara sets about her work in the bar, whose ‘front shone with vermilion paint’, the window filled with a ‘tempting exhibition’ of fish, meats and sandwiches, she becomes associated with this carefully-dressed flesh, functioning as one more commodity to tempt the customers, mainly ‘lads and young men who had come forth from neighbouring places of entertainment.’(30-1). And once she is positioned in this way, the text delves into her past, seeking explanation for her new status. That explanation is found, not in the exhausting practices of the metropolitan workroom, but in her father’s indulgence of Clara, and a teacher’s encouragement of her early love of ‘display’ (80-81). Significantly, too, the narrator is interested in the months leading up to Clara’s change of occupation in terms only of her enjoyment of the spectacle of theatre. Although chaperoned on such trips, the narrative frames her interest in terms of violent passion: she had ‘watched each actress with devouring interest, with burning envy.’(85)

In further ‘explaining’ Clara’s presence at Mrs Tubbs’s, the narrative fabricates a window which, like the window of Mrs Tubbs’s bar, displays the female body. This window, however, presents its dangerous attraction to those young women who have opportunity to loiter in the public street. The scene in which this window appears is one of the very few, and very brief, representations of Clara alone on the streets of the metropolis which occur in the course of *The Nether World*. In a text notable for its topographical specificity, this paradigmatic representation of spectacular absorption is constructed as luminous memory, floating free of locale. The reader is told only that, somewhere in London, during Clara’s time as a workgirl, on ‘passing’ a display window, her gaze would be employed, thus:

In passing a shop-window where photographs were exposed, she looked for those of actresses, and gazed at them with terrible intensity. 'I am as good-looking as she is. Why shouldn't my portrait be seen some day in the windows?' And then her heart throbbed, smitten with passionate desire. As she walked on there was a turbid gloom about her, and in her ears the echoing of a dread temptation. Of all this she spoke to nobody. (82)

As Rita Felski notes, in the literature of modernity, 'reference to temptation and seduction abound.'¹¹ Felski refers overwhelmingly to bourgeois women's practices of consumption. Here, it is the impoverished woman's response to the show window which is portrayed in terms of intoxication, seduction, the conversion of passer-by into absorbed spectator.¹² But Gissing is taking the trope of woman at shop window beyond the realm of seduction, and into that of penetration and death.

For Clara, the images she consumes at the commercial window stand for yet another site of spectacular display: the theatre. The workgirl, reflected obliquely in the glass of the shop window, is conflated with the commodified figures in the photographs: the window and the glazed images become sites of fantasy, of transformation.¹³ Responding to the city's finery, Clara will model herself on the disreputable actress, mass-produced phantom of the public sphere. She will mimic the actress's parasexuality, her distanced glamour, first in the luncheon bar, then onstage in professional simulation.¹⁴

The desires stimulated in Clara by the public artifice of theatre are associated with 'the thoughtless talk' depicted as representative of 'most London workgirls' (82).

¹¹ Felskip. 69.

¹² Friedberg, pp. 65-66.

¹³ The interchangeability of actress's bodies is discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁴ Rendell, Jane, 'Subjective Space: A Feminist Architectural History of the Burlington Arcade' in *Desiring Practices*, ed. by Rüedi, Wigglesworth and McCorquodale, pp. 216-230; Valverde; Benjamin notes that the public were familiarised with photography through the major exhibitions of the 1850s, where politics and theatre were juxtaposed: 'The public at the exhibition thronged before the numerous portraits... in so lifelike a form, the celebrated figures of the stage, of the podium.' Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, B [Y1a, 4], p. 673.

Thus the narrator frames Clara's unusual rejection of 'sham' items of clothing not as sign of discernment, but as fin-de- siècle expression of the love of finery (26). Like Harkness's Nelly Ambrose, Clara registers social atomization by taking her inspiration for stylish dressing, not from the genteel employers or lady philanthropists she might encounter in Clerkenwell and beyond, but from figures produced by commodity culture. Chiming with both deep-rooted concerns around finery and the pathologizing of emerging modes of consumerism, Clara's inappropriate emulation is associated with threat to the moral and social order.

Clara's ambition to labour in the city's emerging spectacular and heterosocial spaces is coded as all too feminine in its ready response to artifice, its necessary secrecy ('Of all this she spoke to nobody') and its desire to consume - a constant, greedy pressing against the glass: 'It is the thwarted gaze that seduces.'¹⁵ Clara, as we are told elsewhere in the text, 'never' loves anyone (292). Yet the artificial life of the photograph, merged with her own reflection, sets her heart throbbing, and thrills her with 'passionate desire' (82). With every throb of her 'smitten heart' she is connected more deeply with what is artificial, inorganic, dead. Moreover, Sidney Kirkwood's subsequent assertion that he thinks of Clara as one who is dead is in keeping with common notions as the actress, as the prostitute, as 'lost' and socially dead (168). This association of Clara, a New Woman from a working-class background, with death, invokes those late-Victorian narratives and images in which the mobile and emancipated woman is unwomanly, starved, vampiric. The connection of this scene to tropes common to fin-de-siècle representations of the female vampire can be traced, not only through tropes of death and urban infection, but through images of gender instability.

¹⁵ Armstrong, p. 122.

As Alexandra Warwick puts it, 'The link between the masculine woman, the vampire and syphilis is one which recurs frequently' in late-Victorian culture.¹⁶ Certainly, Clara's encounter with the display of photographs is impressed with suggestions of lesbianism. Pictures of actresses (though predominantly those working in 'illegitimate' theatre) were commonly used as erotic wish-images; interestingly, the prominent sexologist Havelock Ellis, active in the heterosocial intellectual milieu of the fin-de-siècle metropolis, declared that theatrical work and aptitude stimulated 'abnormal sexuality', accepting the claim that lesbianism was 'extremely common in theatres' owing to simultaneous 'inaction' and 'excitement' in the dressing room.¹⁷

Essentially, Clara fantasizes for herself a mode of social and geographical mobility involving the 'capture' and distribution of her image in networks of commerce. This mass-produced projection would effectively take Clara's place in Mrs Tubbs's window, promising the young men of the modern city democratic access to her face and body while delivering only a phantom.¹⁸ Clara yearns to become no mere commodified body (an actress) appearing before a live audience, but a representative image, a mass-produced portrait activating a collective virtual gaze which it cannot return.

¹⁶ Alexandra Warwick, 'Vampires and the Empire: Fears and Fictions of the 1890s' in *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.202-220

Warwick, p. 205.

¹⁷ Davis, pp. 72-3; see also Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, B [3,8], p.69; Buck-Morss *Dialectics*, pp. 97-101 ; Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 6 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1948), I, p 218.

¹⁸ Models of mental dissolution in fin de siècle psychology brought into play interactive concepts of illusion or projection, and the 'inorganic' (alienated, isolated). See Ed. Block Jr., 'James Sully, Evolutionist Psychology and Late Victorian Gothic Fiction', *Victorian Studies* 25 (1982), 443-467.

This episode is among a number in which the commercial windows of Gissing's Clerkenwell are depicted as displaying poisons, metaphorical and literal. Pennyloaf Hewett's limited mobility and spending power as downtrodden wife to Bob informs her morbid response to commercial displays of dough-pudding. In describing Pennyloaf's response to unwholesome food, the novel repeats the trope of impoverished woman filled with 'passionate desire' at the shop window. In this instance, however, a perilous reactivity to commercial aesthetics is located in a body suffering malnourishment. Hunger and constriction exacerbate feminine desire; the response is delineated in terms of pathology:

Like all the women of her class, utterly ignorant and helpless in the matter of preparing food, [Pennyloaf...] expended her few pence daily on whatever happened to tempt her in a shop [...] In the present state of her health she often suffered from a morbid appetite [...] Thus, there was a kind of cake exposed in a window in Rosoman Street, two layers of pastry with half an inch of something like very coarse mincemeat in between [...] not seldom she ate four, even six, of these squares, as heavy as lead, making this her dinner. A cookshop within her range exhibited at midday great dough-puddings, kept hot by jets of steam that came up through the zinc on which they lay [...] Pennyloaf often regaled both herself and the children with thick slabs of it [...] Pease-pudding also attracted her [...] she did not venture to buy more than a couple of ounces [of treacle] at a time, knowing by experience that she could not resist this form of temptation, and must eat and eat till all was finished (266-7)

This incident is key to the text's confused representation of the modes of vulnerability, moral failure and urban contamination which contribute to Pennyloaf's marital torment. Although the novel acknowledges her inadequate budget and links her 'morbid appetite' to her 'present state of health', Pennyloaf's nutritional 'ignorance' is merged with a devastating susceptibility to urban aesthetics (266). Vitally, the narrator stages her response to the display window in terms of the compatible religious and socio-medical concepts of 'temptation' and 'morbidly.'¹⁹ For just it blames her 'in a great degree [...] for the ills of her married life', the text fabricates Pennyloaf as one

¹⁹ For the compatibility of such discourses see Mary Callan Martin, *Hard and Unreal Advice: Mothers, Social Science and the Victorian Poverty Experts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.147.

more female willingly seduced by unwholesome commercial display (212).

Environmental factors conflate with the ‘suggestion of an invisible and remorseless morbid accumulation’ – of organic defect and disease.²⁰ Just as the evolutionary rhetoric of the fin de siècle was used by social commentators ‘very loosely and metaphorically, rather than in any exact scientific and literal way’, Gissing’s scene jumbles together images of moral contagion and biological transmission.²¹

As her mother struggled unavailingly against the desire for the ‘drugs’ retailed at Mrs Green’s beershop in Rosoman Street, Pennyloaf yearns for immersion in the substances, ‘coarse’ and ‘heavy as lead,’ which are ‘exposed’ in a different window of temptation on the same street (76; 266). Though an appetite for alcohol was, like an appetite for unwholesome foods, linked by commentators to malnourishment, it could nonetheless invite censure.²² As an ‘ignorant’ mother suffering from morbid cravings analogous to alcoholism, responding to ‘whatever happened to tempt her,’ Pennyloaf exposes her children to a toxic diet, shifting the dangers of seduction and pollution – in the often analogous conceptualizations common to social debate at the fin de siècle – to the wider communal organism.²³ Further, this craving for ‘great dough puddings’ links, and contrasts, suggestively with the urban spectacles to which Jane Snowdon, Gissing’s properly feminine factory girl, responds. Her eyes are made wide, and her heart aches, not at the appetising content of shop windows, but on seeing the symptoms of social and biological degeneration: – ‘doughy-limbed abortions [...] the

²⁰ Pick, p.168 (he is discussing *Dracula*).

²¹ Harris, ‘Between Civic’, p.79.

²² See for example Helen Bosanquet, *The Standard of Life and Other Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1898), p.22

²³ For a very helpful discussion of notions of the social organism, see the closing chapters of Eileen Yeo’s *Contest For Social Science*.

hapless spawn of diseased humanity’ found on the domestic doorsteps of ‘a disagreeable quarter’ of the metropolis (129-30).²⁴

The windows of Clerkenwell, then, are as potently seductive as the West End’s vistas of luxury consumption, and more dangerous to public health. The cookshop window figures as metonymic and literal site of all that is artificial and addictive, achieving its powers of corruption through the gross corporeal appetites of Woman’s moralized and medicalized body. At such a window, with its alluring modern technologies of display, its glass, zinc and steam, even pease pudding may function as a potent wish image: for all that her cravings are associated with malnourishment, the foods Pennyloaf relishes figure not as the calorific fare she can afford, but as metropolitan poisons alluring to the unschooled feminine gaze, which are benignly and morbidly desired.²⁵

In the London Gissing produces, modern cultural goods of all kinds encourage and feed a deranged feminine appetite. Clem Peckover, at home (in more than one sense) in ‘dirt and disorder’, gorges herself on food and ‘police news’ – on popular representations of murders, trials and executions. (260). Her hunger for sensational images, like Clara’s enchantment before commercial photographs of ‘public’ women, rehearses familiar anxieties around printed matter in an age of mass production and circulation. However, Clem being the very model of feminine bodily excess, such slothfulness merely serves as the interval between bouts of streetwalking:

²⁴ The image of the baby as ‘abortion’ or ‘homunculus’ in fin-de-siècle slum fiction is discussed in chapters seven and eight of this thesis.

²⁵ To some degree the novel endorses widespread notions of the domestic incompetence and needlessly poor feeding practises of impoverished mothers – notions which fed into late-Victorian anxieties around Imperial ‘race’ fitness, prompting mass pedagogical schemes to counter working-class ‘inefficiency.’ For example, Helen Bosanquet, leading light of the Charity Organization Society, accused impoverished mothers of ‘weak impulse control’ and asserted that ‘Improper feeding is a far more potent cause of starvation among the children of the poor than insufficient feeding.’ Bosanquet, *Standard of Life*, p. 70; Helen Bosanquet *Rich and Poor* (London, Macmillan, 1896), p. 92. .

Till of late she had either abandoned herself all day long to a brutal indolence [...] reviewing the chances that she might eventually have plenty of money and no Joseph Snowdon as a restraint upon her; or else, her physical robustness demanding exercise, she walked considerable distances about the localities she knew, calling now and again upon an acquaintance (260).

Clem's husband is dangerously disinterested in moving to restrain her independence (259-60). He could not be more different in this regard to refined Sidney Kirkwood - a man repelled by commercial aesthetics and sidelined by the changes it produces in female subjectivity - who frequents the streets of Islington in anxious love for Clara. In Gissing's later novel *The Odd Women*, Edmund Widdowson, a conservative patriarch alarmed by signs of feminine autonomy in the commercial city, pays an investigator to track his wife, Monica, a peripatetic former shopgirl, whom he suspects of infidelity. There follows a confrontation of domestic horror and control between husband and wife in which Monica is told that 'The prostitute in the street is sooner to be believed.'²⁶ Where Clem Peckover's travels are concerned, however, it is the narrator who turns detective, framing omniscience as spousal voyeurism: 'We must follow her on one of these evenings ostensibly passed at Mrs Peckover's - no, not follow, but discover her at nine o'clock'(260). On this occasion, it is not the female wanderer who is endangered - Clem being unambiguously polluting, her husband being supremely indifferent - but Clem's rival, Pennyloaf, and her children.

It is significant that when Clem is 'discovered' by the narrator, she is sitting in a 'shabby' pastry shop in Old Street which is dominated by a commercial window filled with 'pastry and sweet-stuff' - significant because the shop window beautifies poison, masks evil (260). The shop's back room, 'furnished with three marble-topped tables, invited those who wished to eat and drink' (261), echoes in its humble way the increasingly palatial environments in which a moneyed public might shop and eat in

²⁶ George Gissing *The Odd Women* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 285.

the century's closing decades. Here, behind the attractive-looking but unwholesome 'sweet-stuff', Clem demonstrates her depravity, sharing with Bob her murderous imaginings - of his removing Pennyloaf, of Jane Snowdon meeting with 'a accident', of Clem finding means to 'get rid of' her husband (261-3).

At an obvious material level, the leisured consumption of pastries and cocoa during which Clem urges Bob to beat and starve his wife, contrasts strongly both with Pennyloaf's emaciated longings before dough puddings and with Clara's attraction to photographic displays. Yet, in all of these instances, the minor phantasmagoric spaces of the city function as veritable technologies of pollution, exciting dangerous female appetite. And as with the display window at which Clara devours images of actresses, the pastry shop presents a humble slice of urban dazzle which connects with another spectacular site - that of theatre. In a spatial arrangement suggestive of the superficiality and intrigue of the playhouse, the narrator has three workgirls enter the shop and buy cakes, voices 'loud in gossip and laughter', while beyond the confectionary the adulterers plot betrayal and violence, their forms veiled behind a 'looped pink curtain' (260-2).

Indeed Clem, like Clara, delights in the theatre. Although the women's levels of sophistication are different, they each take pleasure in ways that combine morbid vanity and voracious desire. Clem does not imagine herself onstage because her 'slow brain' is incapable of this kind of projection; she aims to be 'of importance in her familiar circle' in the pit – microcosm of the nether world and a part of the theatre often functioning as a soliciting zone for prostitutes. (259-60)²⁷ Likewise, her ambition is to be both seen *and heard*: in contrast to Clara, she wants to circulate, not via dead

²⁷ Davis, p. 148.

images, but through corporeal presence and repute (gossip).²⁸ Clem's desire to visit only 'the localities she knew' underlines her desire for vulgar, material self-display, her sensual immersion in the moment and the lack of curiosity motivating her rambling body (260).

In the text of *The Nether World*, it is not only the leisured encounter with modernity's spectacles which corrupts. The desires and moral-medial pollution generated by female interaction with commercial aesthetics are exacerbated by malnourishment, constriction and toil. The novel draws upon both late-Victorian sociological investigation and social medicine in relating Clara's experiences behind the bar. This text of naturalism fixates on the female body's liability to taint and regression, and plots the emergence of its dark interior. For the city's finery is morally and medically toxic.

THE WINDOWS OF MODERNITY: TENDING THE SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

In Gissing's London of scarcity, the female anatomy positioned with the reflective surfaces of the city manifests social transformation as devolution and infection. While mobility amid the shop windows of London is dangerous for women, confinement only exacerbates feminine desire – a desire bound up with bodily horror. Pennyloaf's poisonous encounters with commercial windows occur in the context of a marriage in which, in a grotesque parody of the ideal of the 'family wage', Pennyloaf and her

²⁸ For David Trotter, this embodiment from Clem's point of view – her 'juicy self respect' - is of a part with Gissing's struggle to realize divisions within the slum. David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 257.

children are effectively starved by the craftsman upon whose earnings they depend.²⁹ Thus Pennyloaf degenerates, her body excessively reproductive, while Clara, incapable of conventional romantic love, is marked with vice through excessive toil, dangerous exposure and consuming desire.³⁰ Having crossed from Clerkenwell to the pleasure pavements of Islington to appear as window dressing, Clara is positioned at the threshold (*as the threshold*) of a venue of commercial male pleasure. Relatively static, objectified by male customers, she is nonetheless a disruptive urban presence, her body displayed at the interstices of public and private space, her labouring form, in such a context, transgressing historical notions of male labour and female consumption. And all the while she generates *her own* desires and fantasies of mobility.³¹

As Emma Liggins claims, the figure of the prostitute ‘lurks behind’ Gissing’s representations of a range of ‘public’ women trading on their physical appearance.³² On the one hand, the economic exploitation to which Clara is exposed (which is examined at more length below) serves as partial explanation of her yearning to escape into the illusory world of theatre – about the everyday realities of which she is seemingly deluded. Simultaneously, the positioning of Clara in this space, in these clothes, nurturing a secret desire to become an actress and planning to buy more expensive forms of finery ‘for the better kind of engagement she had in view’, links back to the familiar narratives tracing prostitution not to poverty, but to narcissistic

²⁹ For the ideal of the family wage in context, see Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1992).

³⁰ Moreover, both women demonstrate a lack of womanly training: Clara cannot sew; Penny can sew, but cannot cook or budget.

³¹ For the notion of the threshold in the work of Benjamin see *Benjamin’s Arcades: An unGuided Tour*, ed. by Peter Buse and others (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 53-55.

³² Liggins, ‘Her Appearance’, p.32.

craving and artifice (78-79). Altogether, functioning as the confined wish-image of male fantasy, Clara is depicted as a troubling and desiring subjectivity in transition.³³

For all Clara's triumphant escape from the patriarchal authority of the home, the toil of producing the phantasmagoric scene of the luncheon bar entails confinement and surveillance, leading to ill health: her nerves 'strung almost beyond endurance,' she spends her shifts fixed behind the counter, or displayed alongside other commodities in the window (83-4). If anything, the mobility of her gaze has been compromised by her change of occupation. Yet this exploitation within a spectacular workplace produced by the new service economy - like the theatre and its associated display window - only increases her desire, and the apparent opportunities, for transformation. Her encounters with Scawthorne, a theatrical agent determined to recruit her for the stage, further excite those 'ambitions which now gave her no rest' (83).

In representing Clara's experience at Mrs Tubbs's, the novel acknowledges the dialectical relationship between leisure and labour, production and consumption. It outlines the hardships to which Clara is subjected in accord with the findings of contemporary social investigation. Demoralization and illness result from working long shifts during which 'speaking and holding silence [...] were no longer the consequences of her own volition' (88). Yet though the narrative explores the sufferings of the exploited labouring body, it fabricates that body in terms of an overwhelming gender- and class-specific corporeality. While social investigation did stress the moral risk of the barmaid's work as much as exhaustion, low pay and

³³ The narrative's portrayal of Clara's duties at the bar, where she is kept working for 'insufferably long' hours, echoes social investigatory findings. [Margaret Harkness, ed.], *Toilers in London: Inquiries Concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), pp. 205-214; Barbara Drake, 'The Barmaid' *Women's Industrial News* 65 (1914), 22-38.

anaemia, *The Nether World* explores that moral risk in terms of contemporary models of pathology.³⁴ Indeed, the title in which these events occur is entitled ‘Pathological.’ She suffers from ‘fever’ (with its multiple suggestions of contagion and the miasmatic slum), combined with the alternate hysteria and lethargy, extreme weight loss and unuttered screams. (84-88).

An ‘outworn’ Clara, ‘sickened’ and ‘robbed of all appetite’ by her work, stands in the window of Mrs Tubbs’s in ‘idleness of thought’, hoping to catch a glimpse of Sidney in the crowd.³⁵ This image prompts the Scawthorne to enter the bar, and, in her deteriorating condition, Clara is susceptible to his phantasmagoric overtures of ‘unemotional intimacy’ (84-85). The narrator declares that the character of her suffering is ‘altered’ by Scawthorne’s tales of her former friend Grace Rudd, a working actress. News of Grace provokes a ‘hot tumult of heart and brain’ and Clara’s suffering becomes ‘less womanly, it defied weakness, it grew to a fever of fierce, unscrupulous rebellion’ (86). Once more, the novel conflates urban phantasmagoria and its effects with infection and decay, and merges ruinous environmental factors with moral taint and congenital abnormality. The narrator claims that the desire generated by the city’s aesthetics combined with overwork in the bar brings forth ‘the disease inherent in [Clara’s] being’ (86). This biomedical terminology, this ‘emblematic verbiage’, opens up a reading of Clara’s ‘rebellion’ in terms of moral-medical contagion, whether in the form of baleful social influence or of ‘infection

³⁴ [Harkness] *Toilers*, pp. 205-214; Drake. However, the representation in *The Nether World* does not feature the susceptibility to drunkenness common to social investigatory representations.

³⁵ The narrator stresses the conditions and odours in which Clara works, but it is not entirely clear that Clara’s symptoms can be dissociated from the symptoms of disorders such as anorexia. Though medics tended to attribute anorexia not to material causes but to a ‘morbid mental state’ and often allied the condition with passivity and contentment, it was also linked to female defiance and ‘unwomanly’ conduct. Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and Culture in England, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p. 127.

jumping across bodies.’³⁶ Appearing to suggest predisposition in Clara, the narrator blends the effects of exploitation with those of heredity: ‘The disease inherent in her being, that deadly outcome of social tyranny which perverts the generous elements of youth into mere seeds of destruction, developed day by day, blighting her heart, corrupting her moral sense, even setting seeds of evil upon the beauty of her countenance’ (86). It is significant that her father’s propensity to ‘rebellion,’ particularly when under emotional stress, is explored in the novel, and takes the form of susceptibility to the lights of the gin palace and the delivery of incoherent political speeches - in keeping with a range of discourses which cited pro-democratic activity as a symptom of urban morbidity.³⁷

In the cosmetic, liminal space of the bar, Clara herself is revealed as a liminal creature, contagion emerging to mark the tissue of her body while her mind enters the vaunted mental ‘borderland’ of specialist and popular-scientific discourses.³⁸ Commodity and object of consumption, manipulated victim and vociferous consumer, Clara, the public woman, degrades. Changing states of consciousness – effectively an unravelling of Clara’s body and mind – develop the connection between the spectacular and transformative spaces of the display window, the theatre and the luncheon bar. In conjunction with her ‘fever’, and in spite of reduced ‘mental

³⁶ Harris, ‘Between Civic’, p. 86; Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.66.

³⁷ Alcoholism, a taste for stimulants and narcotics, and the ingestion of tainted foods were variously identified during the latter nineteenth century with poverty, weak will and forms of organic defect Philip Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology, 1834-1914: An Essay with Selected Papers* (London University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 43; J. B. Brown, ‘The Pig or the Sty: Drink and Poverty in Late Victorian Britain’, *International Review of Social History* 18 (1973), 380-95; Mort, pp. 134-5. Scott McCracken interprets John Hewett’s speeches in terms of the ‘subsidiary dreamworlds’ of the novel’: Scott McCracken, ‘Between Dreamworlds and Real Worlds: Gissing’s London’ in *Gissing and the City: Cultural Crisis and the Making of Books in Late Victorian England* ed. by McCracken, p. 96.

³⁸ Notable among those psychiatric works pathologizing women and the working classes are those by Henry Maudsley and T.S. Clouston. See Henry Maudsley, *Body and Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1870); *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: HS King & Co, 1874); Thomas Smith Clouston, ‘The Psychological Dangers to Women in Modern Social Development’ in *The Position of Women Actual and Ideal*, ed. by Sir Oliver Lodge (London: James Nisbet, 1911), pp.103-117; *Female Education From A Medical Point of View: Two Lectures* (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1882).

process', phantoms of desire are perceived as possibilities by a fast-degenerating Clara: 'The news of Grace Rudd had flashed upon her as a revelation of a clear possibility where hitherto she had seen only mocking phantoms of futile desire' (86). The intelligence which materializes these phantoms is represented 'flash[ing] upon' her like the flashlamp of the photographic studio upon an actress's body. As with the 'marks of evil' which now appear on her face, the 'flash' can also be read as prefiguring the acid attack which will scar her face. (86) This image, too, links to the constricted sufferings of Pennyloaf Hewett. The biological damage done to Pennyloaf's 'poor prettiness' by her marriage with its assaults, malnourishment and child-bearing is understood in terms of mutilation: her face, site of her sexuality, is 'wasted under the disfigurement of pains and cares' (130).

Clara makes a leisure trip to the theatre with Scawthorne, on which occasion she exhibits a 'reckless desire' to be seen by Sidney Kirkwood – a desire which subsequently hardens to 'a pride in evil repute' (87; 95). The alluring spectacle of theatre produces a 'high flush', akin to fever, again prefiguring the burning of Clara's skin. Seeing Grace Rudd on the stage, she finds that Grace's face and voice are 'wholly strange', a perception of her old friend carrying multiple suggestions: the acculturation of the theatre, Clara's own disturbance, the physiological changes which were alleged to accompany the descent into vice, and the interchangeable status of actresses: it is Grace who will subsequently make Clara's face unrecognizable (88).

Once she has left her job at the luncheon bar, Clara is trailed by Sidney Kirkwood to her lodgings, and a public argument ensues during which he is 'startled by the change in her features' as 'the haggardness of her countenance smote [him] like a sword-edge'(92-3). Indeed, the narrator's determination to cast Clara's suffering in

terms of pathology and moral taxonomy undermines the very fabrication of Clara as tempting commodity. Examining the process of ‘incorporation’ of female employees’ bodies into an organizational aesthetic standard, Melissa Tyler and Philip Hancock have written that,

Female flight attendants [...] experience their bodies as being ‘on stage’: they must remain self conscious about the impression they are making, with very few ‘back stage’ opportunities. The female flight attendant has, therefore, to remain constantly ‘body conscious’ so as not to make a spectacle of herself, by inadvertently disclosing or exposing parts of her uncontrolled and undisciplined ‘natural’ body as failures of diet, grooming or exercise... [F]emale flight attendants are specifically required to appear as sexually attractive and desiring embodied commodities.³⁹

This concept of body consciousness may be helpful in thinking through the overdetermined representation of Clara’s symptoms. Clara has been toiling in a demanding environment while functioning as embodied commodity. In the course of this work she has descended into an ‘uncontrolled and undisciplined ‘natural’ body’, in this context ‘natural’ being the body of femininity, pathology and heredity. This process has degraded the very good looks for which she was originally employed. Yet she is still maintained in her post, and is considered so great an asset to the bar that, when she leaves, an embittered Mrs Tubbs attacks her reputation (91).

Following the public confrontation with Sidney, in which her ‘haggardness’ is so shockingly apparent, Clara returns to her lodgings. Even here, her dangerous relations with commercial city space are developed. She accidentally breaks the glass in her bedroom window, cutting her palm and allowing the blood to congeal because binding the wound is ‘beyond her strength’ (94). Set against the window displays, framed as sites of toxic allurements, which appear elsewhere in the text, the breaking of

³⁹ Tyler, Melissa, and Philip Hancock, ‘Flight Attendants and the Management of Gendered ‘Organizational Bodies’ in *Constructing Gendered Bodies*, ed. by Kathryn Backett-Milburn and Linda McKie (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 25-38 (pp. 32-33).

glass suggests not only the final break with the patriarchal home, but the destruction of barriers to Clara's poisonous and intensifying desires. As Elaine Showalter reminds us, 'In a sense, the elements of hunger, rebellion, and rage latent in the phenomenon of nervous disorder became explicit and externalized in the tactics of the suffrage campaign.'⁴⁰ Yet where the lone 'pathological' subject of 1889 is concerned, this shattering of boundaries is envisaged not in terms of energy and release, nor even of conscious 'rebellion', but of an unconscious act of despair and exhaustion which leads only to 'a fierce desire to plunge herself into ruin' (94). In this narrative, the bright lights of modernity lead only to darkness.

**UNEARTHING THE SLUM MEDUSAS:
VEILS AND VAMPIRES IN *THE NETHER WORLD***

In part, repulsion at commercial artifice is expressed in Gissing's narrative through an association between the spectacular urban and the temptations and horrors presented by women's flesh. Likewise, Zola's novel *Nana*, published almost a decade before *The Nether World*, presents the decadent Paris of the Second Empire as seething with the perceived horrors of female physicality, whether painted, flaccid or gaunt. Backstage in the phantasmagoric city, 'dirty nooks and crannies' and the sight of 'grubby' women's underwear excites the unworldly Comte Muffet. The sight of Nana applying cosmetics reminds him of a pubescent glimpse of a maid washing herself, evoking those metonymic associations between dirt, femininity, disturbed social distinctions, and contagion, so key to representations of the consuming and commodified woman.⁴¹ Notably, the Comte interprets the powdered parasexuality of the actress-courtesan in

⁴⁰ Showalter, *Female Malady*, p. 162; Maroula Joannu, *Ladies, Please Don't Break the Glass* (Oxford: Berg, 1995).

⁴¹ Emile Zola, *Nana* trans. by George Holden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp.147-155.

terms of religious temptation: ‘Nana had slowly been taking possession of him for some past [...] reminding him of the pious stories of diabolic possession which he had read as a child. [...] Nana was the devil, with her laughter, her breasts and her crupper, which seemed swollen with vice.’⁴²

The text of *The Nether World*, too, deals in seduction and in invisible attacking powers – the devolutionary forces unleashed when the female form interacts with spectacles of modernity. Like the Comte Muffet, Bob Hewett and Sidney Kirkwood are in thrall to a powerful and contaminating urban femininity linked to the spread of fevers and pathology. And as the following discussion demonstrates, *The Nether World*, like *Nana*, inflicts upon the ambitious female protagonists the death’s head of the prostitute. For, having explored the presentation of the display window as technology of corruption in Gissing’s novel, I now investigate the network of connections between images of the prostitute, the veil, regression and the gorgon-vampire widely-circulating at the fin de siècle - and present in *The Nether World*. In Gissing’s extraordinary fiction, these elements erupt, as female forms distorted by exposure to urban spectacle consume the vitality of the novel’s men. Previous chapters of this thesis have identified certain cultural associations in a range of texts addressing female labour, sexuality, commercial spectacle and infection. I suggest that, in Gissing’s novel, urban spectacle emerges as effectively syphilitic in its infectiousness and degenerative potential

Clem Peckover’s ungovernable fantasies develop through her affair with Bob Hewett, which unfolds at venues of promenade, display and commercial exchange. Their affair begins with a chance meeting of two aimless ramblers. Clem accosts Bob,

⁴² Ibid, p.155.

who is 'straying about the streets', on High Holborn. She is walking alone, dressed in faux apparel (velveteen and imitation fur); the narrator asserts suggestively that '[N]o one could have mistaken the class she belonged to.'⁴³ And it is significant that the accosted male's first response is 'almost a leap [...] turn[ing] a face of terror' (219).⁴⁴

Like the French aristocrat fixated by the commodified modern form of Nana, Bob is gripped by an infatuation in which languages of moral fall, supernatural possession and infection merge. He gradually withers before the robust and desiring subjectivity of this tough urban rambler, and, significantly, Clem is coded as Medusa, with her 'ferocious beauty', her 'immense' head 'with its pile of glossy hair', in whose gaze he finds a 'horrible fascination, a devilish allurements' (120, 332). With this powerful gaze she takes visual possession of the spectacular metropolis, and of Bob. The woman who absorbs and carries the city's poisons communicates the corruption to her lover, disempowering him. Initially a 'masculine' metropolitan stroller, Bob disintegrates rapidly under her castrating stare: following his final meeting with Clem, the tropes of 'feminization' and contagion are at their most explicit:

[H]e was infected by the savagery of the woman who had taken possession of him. Her lust of cruelty crept upon him like a disease, the progress of which was hastened by all the circumstances of his disorderly life. The man was conscious of his degradation; he knew how he had fallen ever since he began criminal practices [...] The loss of his daily work [...] was the last thing needed to complete his ruin [...] Corruption was eating to his heart; from every interview with Clem he came away a feeblers and a baser being (333).⁴⁵

Enfeebled and 'possessed,' Bob ends as the pawn of his mobile, 'devilish' mistress, who, vampire-like, infects him with her own reversionary sadism and greed.

⁴³ The narrator subsequently describes Clem's voice as being 'such as one hears at the street corner' (319).

⁴⁴ One is reminded of Walkowitz's striking image of the power of the 'male gaze' being met by the 'blunt, frontal stare of the prostitute' in a phantasmagoric representation of Jack the Ripper's East End: Walkowitz, *City*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ It is fitting that the actress Clara's brother should pursue counterfeiting.

Fittingly, having battered his still-feeble wife ('He hated her because Clem bade him do so') Bob's own injurious activities are checked when he is literally staked – not by Abraham Van Helsing, but by the shaft of a cart. (333). This instance of male disempowerment recalls Elizabeth Wilson's suggestion that the figure of the flâneur manifested male response to the new urban scene, and its corrosive effect on masculinity. As Wilson puts it, 'The male gaze has failed to annihilate the castrate, woman'.⁴⁶ It is perhaps significant that in the quotation above relating to Clem's 'infect'ion of Bob, her appropriating, animalistic mobility figures alongside unemployment and criminality as a major environmental blight. Indeed, in a city of reflective surfaces and unstable boundaries, Woman becomes vampiric, she turns castrator.

Like the slum gorgons described by Annie Besant assaulting the closed and sculpted body of Gladstone with brickbats, Clem is marked by the city's pollution, and thirsting for blood. She presents social threat not only through the atavism with which her body is inscribed, but through the dynamism of her grossly desiring subjectivity - her devouring mobile gaze. For the text represents the 'brutal' factory girl's 'robust' body, embedded throughout the novel in the language of atavism, as 'demanding exercise' (260). Thus the text creates a sense of a disconnected, autonomous being pursuing an overwhelmingly corporeal mode of urban rambling.⁴⁷ Mobility figured in this way evokes the conceptual intersections between the prostitute's body, the body of the costermonger, and other subjects marked by anxiety around social dislocation. In

⁴⁶ Wilson points to the meaning of the labyrinth as male impotence; she combines this spatial interpretation of the city with that of agoraphobic 'giddy' space producing hysteria and tempting 'the individual who staggers across it to do anything and everything – commit a crime, become a prostitute.' Wilson, 'Invisible', p.109

⁴⁷ Greenslade, *Degeneration* pp. 75-76; Keating, *Working Classes*, pp. 87-89; Mitchell, p.13 An essentialist-evolutionary interpretation of Clem has been challenged by David Trotter, who sees in her a self-respecting refusal to recognize middle-class decorum, and by Scott McCracken, who sees Gissing as indulging in dark humour. Trotter, *Cooking*, p.257; McCracken *Masculinities*, pp.57-8.

her discussion of the Medusa-like revolutionary women appearing in a range of nineteenth-century texts, Catherine Gallagher references the figure of the female costermonger. She notes that costermonger communities were viewed in terms of nomadic, non-productive deviancy, and were the focus of ‘fears about the odd mobility and irrational intransigence of an expanding money economy and about the possible independence of urban life’.⁴⁸ In the context of Gissing’s effective uncoupling of Clem’s ‘slow brain’ from her body – from her coarse and sanguine muscularity – Gallagher’s assertion that ‘A social body bursting with costermongers is, like the costermongers themselves, a body being ‘nourished at the expense of the mind’’, is striking.⁴⁹

Moreover, the most radically mobile female figures in *The Nether World* are its most hybrid - Clem for her sheer androgyny, Clara for combining ‘the temper of an ambitious woman with the forces of a man’s brain’ (26).⁵⁰ In her murderous plotting, Clem makes trips in time, space and gender. Her transgressive fantasies climax with her imagining her own entry into the male body of her lover as he murders her husband and violates the corpse. Predictably, this desire is coded as reversion, as savagery:

Brooding on her deadly purpose, she had come to regard it as a certain thing that before long her husband would be killed. [...] Savagely she had exulted in the prospect [...] A thousand times she imagined herself in Bob’s lurking-place, raising the weapon, striking the murderous blow, rifling the man’s pockets to mislead those who found his body [...] T]he next thing was to remove Pennyloaf. (358)

As the novel draws to its close, Clem is arrested for poisoning her mother. She now enters a sensational crime narrative of the kind she once devoured in her leisure

⁴⁸ Gallagher, ‘More About ‘Medusa’s Head’’, p.56.

⁴⁹ Gallagher, ‘The Body Versus’ in *The Making of the Modern Body*, ed. by Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Lacqueur, p.100. Gallagher is discussing representations of the costermonger in Mayhew, I.

⁵⁰ This description of Clara bears interesting comparison with that of Mina in *Dracula*. As Showalter notes, ‘[W]ith her ‘sweet woman’s heart’ but her ‘man’s brain’, Mina is a dangerous hybrid, who must be domesticated through hysteria.’ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p.181.

time (373).⁵¹ While this lurid reportage, the public narrative of her murderous fantasies and desiring gaze, is distributed in shops and domiciles, read and discussed by old acquaintances and strangers alike, Clem herself is taken out of urban circulation, subjected to the mastery of the gaoler-surveyor.⁵² This thwarting of disruptive female movement is also manifested in the ending of Clara Hewett's acting career. Re-entering the novel through a letter to her former common-law-husband Scawthorne, she complains of her 'hateful drudgery' in the spectacular space of the theatre. The epitome of the moral fall through a love of finery, she expresses the need for money to buy dresses: 'For a large sum of money there are few things I wouldn't do.' (200) Her fallenness underscored by her physical deterioration, Clara still broods over 'the wild passions in her heart', her unfulfilled desire for celebrity, much as Clem broods over her fantasies of violence (201; 358)

Both Clara and Grace Rudd figure as commodified women, stimulated by urban spectacle, yet worn down by the toil of maintaining theatrical illusion. The theatre, like the luncheon bar, is a threshold where work and consumption meet, and the constrictive labour of today meets a dreamt-of tomorrow: as at Mrs Tubbs's, the narrative voice subjects Clara to ever greater desire, misery and moral contamination.⁵³ Mirroring Clara, 'pretty but consumptive-looking' Grace is tortured by a malady which will 'haunt her unsparingly to the grave', suggesting the common 'degenerationist' association between tuberculosis and venereal disease (193; 203). Both women experience changing states of consciousness and 'fierce egoism'. In accord with the

⁵¹ In their house at Crouch End, John Hewett tells Sidney that 'one of the men [in Clerkenwell] showed me a report in to-day's paper ... [W]e shall have it in the Sunday paper to-morrow' (373).

⁵² Popular 'police news' publications and some newspapers carried artist's impressions of criminals during this period; see *'Orrible Murder! An Anthology of Victorian Crime and Passion*, ed. by Leonard de Vries and Ilonka Van Amstel (London: McDonald, 1971).

⁵³ As Emma Liggins points out, acting was a precarious profession and the lack of success and professional jealousy represented in the text must have been commonplace: Liggins, 'Her Appearance', pp. 41-42. My concern here is an eroticized medical-moral language which connects contamination and pathology with spectacular 'temptation.'

novel's affiliation of commercial spectacle with neurasthenia and ravenous 'morbidity', they exist 'in a morbid nervous state consumed with discontent' (203).

As fallen women, as commodities, Clara and Grace are indeed interchangeable: Clara is substituted for Grace as leading lady, a privilege apparently dependent upon the tour manager's access to the actress's body. Having accused Clara of selling her body for the role, Grace suffers a consumptive fit; Clara, meanwhile, is represented as by turns frigidly contemptuous and as possessed of a 'seething' mind 'full of fire and tumult' which enters a narcotic 'dream, rather a delirium' when she sees the phantom of celebrity materialize in the form of bills which circulate her name among the public (206-8).⁵⁴ In response, Grace, now appearing as 'a woman with a veiled face, shawl muffling the upper part of her body', dashes acid in Clara's face (208). With this act, the part of Clara's body previously marked by inner corruption is wiped away. Simultaneously, the narrator subjects Clara to an essentialist, moral branding of her flesh. Henceforth Clara shall wear the veil as an imposed sign of modesty.

In an image which both suggests and subverts the cliché of the prostitute's suicide, Grace's crushed and diseased body is then found on the railway line, dressed as 'a lady', her face unidentifiable (209). Clara, Grace's similarly defaced but surviving double, is fetched back to the metropolis by her father. Her fate is advertised and her name circulated through a newspaper report which Clara subsequently burns, in an act symbolic of the destruction of her public life (241-5). While her father feels 'joy' at her return, Clara remains hidden both within the Hewetts' flat in the grim

⁵⁴ The episode of confrontation between Clara and Grace regarding the role of 'leading lady' echoes a scene set at the beginning of Clara's theatrical career, when she experiences a 'strange night' of delirium, of fiery 'delight and torment' during which she paces the room 'often speaking aloud and throwing up her arms' before allowing gleams of blue lightning to play upon her face. This play of lightning suggests, with other images featured in the chapters detailing Clara's time as barmaid, the camera's flash and the acid attack which will disfigure her. (96).

Farringdon Road Buildings and (largely) behind her veil. She is now ‘A tall figure so wrapped and veiled that nothing but the womanly outline could be discerned’ (243). In her confinement, her womanliness is apparently restored. When, in one of the few panoramic visions of the city to appear in the text, the scarred and reclusive Clara gazes out from a window of the Farringdon Road Buildings, she sees the windows, not of commerce, but of Newgate Prison, ‘multiplied for points of torment to the vision’. On the pavements below, people are ‘driven automation-like by forces they neither understood nor could resist’ (280).

Desperate to avoid a future of alienation and sweated labour, Clara writes to her former admirer, Sidney Kirkwood, requesting a meeting, for which she prepares carefully, dressing her hair as she has learnt to do for the stage (282). They meet in a vacated room in the Farringdon Road Buildings, where Clara’s voice and body perform for Sidney both a conscious role in order to attract feelings of obligation, and a cultured mode of gender learnt in theatre. The scene draws together intensively those associations between the commodity, the impoverished woman and bodily horror with which this thesis is concerned.

Modes of objectification and projection at play in this encounter are shared with commercial displays of the female body designed to attract male customers. For example, as Jane Rendell suggests in her cultural history of the Burlington Arcade, ‘The tension between viewing and having, between desire and consummation, was played out through the surface of the woman just glimpsed [...] The surfaces of skin and glass may be associated with the ‘feminine’ enigma which provokes a tension between appearance and concealment of the ‘feminine’ surface and provides a screen

for the projection of fantasy.’⁵⁵ Sidney did not, as Clara had hoped, stand outside Mrs Tubbs’s in hope of glimpsing the woman within, nor did he see her perform on stage. But the meeting between them at the Farringdon Road Buildings recalls those affiliations between the theatre and of the cosmetic window display which characterize the novel’s representation of women’s urban exchanges.

As an actress, Clara became a spectacular fetish which appeared onstage, exchanging one role for another, appropriated by spectators, her meaning as unstable as her pathologized body. The actress publicly plied her sexuality, selling herself as site of visual pleasure and fantasy; hence, as Rita Felski notes, ‘[T]he prostitute and the actress fascinated nineteenth-century cultural critics preoccupied with the decadent and artificial nature of modern life.’⁵⁶ When, with her face damaged, Clara returns from her radical urban ramblings as a spectre, a hollow commodity, her absent face functions as Sidney’s fetish, his theatre of associations, memories and desires:

Her speech was that of an educated woman; the melody which always had such a charm for him had gained wonderfully in richness [...] An actress improvising her part, she regulated every tone with perfect skill... Sidney... saw the dull lamplight just glisten on her hair. [...] She was] Unable to show him by a smile, by a light in her eyes, what mood had come upon her [...] No piece of acting was ever more delicately finished. He knew that she smiled, though nothing of her face was visible; he knew that her look was on of diffident, half-blushing pleasure. (283-4; 287)

As I have been arguing, the text of *The Nether World* shares motifs with contemporary tales of the gothic – motifs drawing upon widely-circulating reinterpretations of biological theory – and with this scene, the novel deals explicitly in images of bodily horror. It is notable that Clara meets Sidney in a tenement room which is reminiscent of a tomb -: chilly, damp, dusty and ill-lit – and that in such conditions Clara feels ‘safe’ (282). Her ‘fevered’ performance of humility in ‘a sober

⁵⁵ Rendell ‘Thresholds’, p. 185

⁵⁶ Felski, pp.19-20.

draping which became her tall elegance' has connotations of the sepulchre, belying the 'heart's blood crying its source from that red fountain of revolt whereon never yet did the upper daylight gleam' (277). Clara's face is an absence onto which the reader's fantasy of horror is projected simultaneously with Sidney's fantasy of modest beauty; meanwhile, the narrator falls back upon a physiognomy of the body which fragments and fetishizes it.⁵⁷ Gissing's description of Clara's still-glistening hair, contrasting with the obscured horror of her face, echoes the image of the death's head, associated with the prostitute, embodying a range of interconnected anxieties, explored at length in the earlier stages of this thesis, around syphilitic infection, the feminine, and organic and social degeneration. Here, the associations which I have been tracing between the desiring female body, exposure to the city's phantasmagoria, and tropes of infection, biological rot and the veil, are brought to a head – so to speak – in the image of Clara, Gissing's actress-prostitute-consumer, his faceless grotesque.

Again, there are parallels with the career and fate of the eponymous heroine of Zola's *Nana*. As that novel closes, the Parisian masses, fevered with excitement at the coming of war, hurry along the city's boulevards where the gas-light is 'dancing in the gilt lettering of the shop-signs'.⁵⁸ As Nana decomposes, so does the social body of France: while the crowd emits 'a pitiful premonition of future massacres', the once fleshly actress-courtesan lies in her hotel bedroom, reduced to a pox-riddled mess.⁵⁹ The reader is informed: 'The features had ceased to be discernible, they already looked like mould from the grave [...] a dark, decaying hole [...] And around this grotesque and horrible mask of death, the hair, the beautiful hair, still blazed like sunlight. Venus

⁵⁷ Halberstam, pp.38-9.

⁵⁸ Zola, *Nana*, p.463

⁵⁹ Zola, *Nana*, pp.458-465.

was decomposing.’⁶⁰ In *The Nether World* as in *Nana*, the commodity is linked insistently to infection, to feminine artifice: to poison caked in make-up, to gendered mass cultures which obscure bodily horror.

As Judith Halberstam, Kelly Hurley and Andrew Smith have discussed, fin-de-siècle horror fictions engages with the very ‘gothic’ of late-Victorian scientific formulations. Fin-de-siècle gothic is a genre ‘thoroughly imbricated with biology,’ which in ‘imagining a sexually aggressive woman as a demonic predator [...] justifies [...] the violent expulsion of this deformed femininity.’⁶¹ In Gissing’s novel, inappropriate feminine desire is manifested in consumerism and deformity, and the narrative quashes its female protagonists’ opportunities to purchase – and to vend – ruthlessly.

Clara’s veil connects with the masked mutilations of syphilis, the urban crowd, and with the mystification of the interchangeable commodity. It invokes the complex associative connections between her own disorderly form, that of Clem Peckover, and those of a host of monstrous castrating Salomes prominent in fin-de-siècle literary and visual cultures.⁶² Appropriately enough, the only description offered in *The Nether World* of Clara’s injuries emphasizes that her lower face is ‘horribly burnt’ – including presumably the orifice of her mouth – rather than her eyes, site of her desiring gaze (242). This image is repeated, if diluted, as Clara’s wilful younger sister Amy spoils her own mouth with acetic acid owing to a morbidly starved appetite (241). Tellingly, she is ‘tempted by other girls’ to see spectacles such as the Lord Mayor’s Show (186).

⁶⁰ Zola, *Nana*, p. 470.

⁶¹ Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (London: Duke University Press, 1995); Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Hurley, p. 5; Craft, p.220.

⁶² Kuryluk.

In the chapter dealing with the Hewetts' life at Crouch End, it seems that Amy may be guilty, not only of losing her job through 'bad behaviour' and of walking the streets hatless, but of breaking a domestic window. And in view of Clara's employment as a barmaid, the narrator's assertion that the craving for vinegar 'is an anticipation of what will befall [female children of the poor] as soon as they find their way to the public-house' is open to more than one reading (366).

Hollowed out, pathologized, an interchangeable 'space of disease', Clara is veiled and removed from urban circulation with its temptations to transgress. Vampire-like, phantasmagoric, her emaciated and pallid figure emerges from the Hewetts' flat 'every third day after dark, stealing silently down the long staircase' (273). Subsequently she leaves the cottage at Crouch End, the north London suburb where she and the other Hewetts make their home with Sidney, only occasionally, 'after sundown, when she veiled herself closely' (379). Indeed, the novel's depiction of Crouch End as a whole evokes a sense of tomblike artificiality. It is represented as an unwholesome 'dark, irregularly rounded patch' on the map of London, where the streets have 'a smell of newness and dampness,' poorly-made plaster windows are 'desiring to be taken for stone' and 'Whatever you touch is at once found to be sham' (375).

Concealed behind the veil, Clara is at last subject to her husband's 'constraining power' and 'stronger will' (379). Yet, though it might signal the privatization of women's sexuality and restrictions on their access to urban toxins, the veil is also 'highly impermanent, while transparency transforms it into a possible entrance or exit... [It is] an image of confinement that endows boundaries with a

transitory and ambivalent fluidity.’⁶³ Clara may be confined, but she is not ‘cured’.

The narrator describes her to the last in terms of disorderly sexuality: ‘Her hair hung in disorder, though not at its full length, massing itself upon her shoulders, shadowing her forehead. Half-consumed by the fire that only death would extinguish, she looked the taller for her slenderness. Ah, had the face been untouched!’ (375). Clearly, she is restrained by the stigma of her past, but Clara remains potentially disruptive, and desiring, woman.

The pathology and disease with which Clara is inscribed form a rather more refined set of bodily horrors than those addressed in the pages which follow. Chapters seven and eight examine at length depictions of coarse carnival pleasures, and of the flow of morbid flesh, from within the female slum body. And this horror is linked once more to the commodity, to the commodification of Woman.

⁶³ Marni Kessler, ‘Dusting the Surface, or the Bourgeoisie, the Veil, and Haussmann’s Paris’ in *The Invisible Flaneuse?*, ed. by Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough, pp. 49-64 (pp. 56-59); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 468-9.

Chapter Seven

SYNTHETICS AND SYPHILIS: CARNIVALS OF DISEASE IN GEORGE GISSING'S *THE NETHER WORLD* AND RUDYARD KIPLING'S 'THE RECORD OF BADALIA HERODSFOOT'

David Trotter's impressive survey of the English novel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century discusses continental naturalism in terms of a 'decline-plot', which represented 'a rapid physical rise to the moment of reproduction in the twenties, then a long redundancy accelerated by the emergence of some innate physical or moral flaw.' Noting that English fin-de-siècle slum fictions draw a 'familiar pattern' for their heroines, from courtship to prostitution or death, Trotter suggests that they present a 'new spin' on naturalism which involves an environmental framework of decline. He draws a fine line between degeneration as an inherited, organic identity, which contrasts with identities formed by practices of production and consumption, 'either through the reciprocal alteration of man and world, or through the adoption of roles and images.'¹

The declining heroines of late Victorian urban fiction are not organically degenerate, asserts Trotter, but 'have the vitality beaten out of them by an inhospitable environment.'² Peter Keating has also noted 'the theme of a feeble, terrorized wife devotedly defending her debased husband', present in George Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889), in Rudyard Kipling's 'The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot' (1893), and in Arthur Morrison's 'Lizerunt' (1894). Emma Francis touches upon this subject in her

¹ David Trotter, *The English Novel in History 1895-1920* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), pp. 112-114.

² Ibid, pp. 116-7.

impressive discussion of the poet and novelist Amy Levy's relationship with socialism. She considers the ways in which 'a grim concatenation of maternal neglect and cynicism, physical violence, complete cultural impoverishment, and appallingly ugly dialect' assists a stereotypical factory girl towards moral and physical decline in a range of fin-de-siècle slum fictions.³ Vitally, the trajectory which Trotter, Keating and Francis see repeated across these fictions tends to be organized in relation to spaces and times of leisure. As Keating has also noted, both George Gissing and Arthur Morrison utilize the 'Bank Holiday courtship [...] to contrast the rowdy horse-play of Cockney love-making with the brutal violence that takes its place once the marriage ceremony is over'.⁴

The following two chapters is concerned with this 'decline', through which, as I argue, a number of late-Victorian slum fictions figured anxiety regarding ongoing social and cultural transformations. I argue that in these fictions, social and cultural change is expressed through representations of urban aesthetics visiting moral and bodily degeneration upon impoverished women. Continuing my study of depictions of the female body made monstrous through exposure to city spectacle, I argue that what Trotter calls a 'decline-plot' of slum femininity is structured upon tension and movement between the gleaming, the modern, the mass-produced surface, and the ever-emerging medical interior. Exposure to the city of spectacles combines with sexual contact to produce fast degeneration in the slum female.

The following discussion continues my reframing of degenerationist scholarship, to show the subtle use of science as metaphor in fin-de-siècle slum

³ Emma Francis, 'Why Wasn't Amy Levy More of a Socialist?: Levy, Clementina Black and *Liza of Lambeth*', in *Amy Levy Critical Essays*, ed. by Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp.47-69 (pp.63-4).

⁴ Keating., *Working Classes*, p.173.

fictions. As scholars such as Stephen Jay Gould, Nancy Stepan and Sander L. Gilman discuss, interactive metaphors or analogies structured biological science in the nineteenth century. Indeed, Stepan has discussed the ‘metaphorical nature of much modern science’.⁵ Informed by such scholarship, I argue that the slum fictions examined here consistently exhibit tropes relating to the female body and to the infant body which are intelligible within, for example, the zoologist Ernst Haeckel’s formulation of ‘biogenetic law,’ but which encode meanings beyond the scientific and medical.⁶ The belief that ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’ - that the individual passes through the evolutionary stages of the race or the species - is a paradigm to which the slum fictions discussed in this chapter consistently appeal.

As Stephen Jay Gould lamented, ‘Recapitulation ranks among the most influential ideas of late nineteenth-century science [...] The *adults* of *inferior* groups must be like *children* of *superior* groups, for the child represents a primitive adult character. If adult blacks and women are like white male children they are living representatives of an ancestral stage in the evolution of the white male.’⁷ The female body outlined by social medicine during this period stands, with the urban working-class body, as a parable of the paradoxes at the heart of degeneration theory, where dangerous refinement and reversionary tendencies meet.⁸ And the scientific discourses which relegated women to an inferior place on the evolutionary ladder were focussed on matters of reproduction. In the following two chapters, I scrutinize the dark forms of propagation, signifying syphilitic infection, evolutionary regression and social

⁵ Stepan ‘Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science’ in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. by David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis; Oxford, University of Minnesota Press 1990), pp.38-57 (p.38).

⁶ Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle Over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago and Bristol: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁷ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, London: Norton, 1981), pp. 114-5. Emphases are Gould’s.

⁸ George J. Ramones, ‘Mental Differences Between Men and Women’, *Nineteenth Century* 21 (1887), 654-672; see also Jane Wood, *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction* (Open University Press, 2001), pp. 163-214.

dissolution, prominent in late-Victorian slum texts. I argue that fictions such as *The Nether World*, 'Lizerunt' and *Liza of Lambeth* understand the female body as a site for the intersection of layers of time: the transitory time of the carnival with its relations to the phantasmagoric modern city; the time of the ageing individual body; and evolutionary time. The material of the secreting, reproductive female form is marked by modernity and environmental onslaught, but it is the focus for that onslaught, combined with heredity.

To a great degree, the fictions discussed here turn upon notions of femininity as contradictory, as a model of surface and depth – of Woman as quintessentially artificial, and yet as shockingly organic.⁹ This dialectic was commonly dramatized in representations of the female body in its relations with visual commercial cultures – with finery. Accordingly, chapters seven and eight of this thesis argue that in late-Victorian slum fictions, the Bank Holiday and similar leisure experiences operate as venues of economic-erotic exchange, at which the aestheticized body of the young slum heroine attains an apparent pinnacle of health. Thereafter she marries, and fades from the glittering, youthful clarity in which the body had been adorned in low-cost fashion. As she fades, her mobility is constricted, and themes of heredity and sexuality are elaborated in tropes of abortion, of death within life - themes closely connected to those images of feminine monstrosity already identified in Gissing's *Clerkenwell* (see chapter six). The slum novels surveyed in the following chapters, like texts of horror and decadence, are ones 'in which the human body is treated as a descriptive text

⁹ Mary J. Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-6; Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1987); Efrat Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity: The Presentation of Woman in Everyday Life* (London: Sage, 1995).

whose ostensibly ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ surface masks the degenerate, devolutionary tendencies to which any organism is prone.’¹⁰

The arguments which follow are ambitious, and in order to help think through their dialectical and temporal intricacies, I employ two intersecting concepts. One is that of the grotesque body. As I shall show, the urban body is depicted as grotesque in Bakhtian sense of participating in the shared experience of carnival. It is also drawn as grotesque in the sense of its subsequent manifestation of degeneration and rot. This degeneration is linked to the absorption of seductive phantasmagoric cultures which, in these fictions, are explicitly twinned with the sexualizing and degrading touch of the working-class male.

In exploring these dialectics of surface and depth, of modernity and atavism, I also touch upon Michel Foucault’s suggestive notion of the heterotopia, particularly in my consideration of Gissing’s complex ‘Io Saturnalia’ chapter in *The Nether World*. In posthumously-published lecture notes, Foucault theorizes heterotopic spaces as paradoxical sites found in all societies, taking ‘varied forms’, and changing through time. He outlines the heterotopia’s capacity to juxtapose ‘in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are incompatible,’ giving such examples as the theatrical stage, and the cinema screen. And there exist, he suggests, ‘absolutely temporal’ and ‘precarious’ heterotopias, which are festive: ‘Such, for example, are the fairgrounds, those marvellously empty sites on the outskirts of cities that seethe once or twice a year with stands, displays, heteroclite objects, wrestlers, snakewomen, fortune-tellers

¹⁰ Susan J. Navarette, *The Shape of Fear: Horror and the Fin- de- Siècle Culture of Decadence* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), p.6.

and so forth.¹¹ The concept of the heterotopia assists in exploring the apparent paradox of contempt for modernity and mass consumption which interlocks with intense fear of social and organic regression. Vitally, the following discussion reveals the way in which this paradox is figured across the female body: The transient moment of carnival is depicted as blending and condensing the synthetic seductions of modernity with the contaminating touch of working-class male flesh. The female body is penetrated by the synthetic and the organic, and corruption results from that penetration. This corruption is expressed in the physical deterioration of the slum heroine. As the following discussion outlines, while the more refined Clara Hewett displays hysteria and pathology, some impoverished women are represented as generating disease, abortion and regression through corporeal reproduction.

BAKHTIN AT SYDENHAM: THE SOCIAL BODY IN *THE NETHER WORLD*

The geographer Rob Shields lauds the heterotopia as site of resistance. Whether his discussion of the ‘real’ space of Brighton Beach neglects its full heterotopic complexity is not the principle concern here.¹² His treatment of the holiday beach serves as a prompt to this discussion because it brings together a number of pertinent themes: Victorian popular leisure, elite disapproval, and the carnivalesque. Shields considers the way in which, following the Bank Holidays Act of 1871, a ‘break with traditional time’ was made possible for increasing numbers of working people. He

¹¹ Ibid., p. 26. Useful commentary can be found in Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), pp.16-17.

¹² See discussion by Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 7 on the valorization of marginal zones as sites of resistance in some recent cultural geography. See also Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.29. For the manufacture and commodification of the heterotopia in modernity ‘from Parisian arcades... to Disney World’: Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys into Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.160.

emphasizes the importance of spatial movement to this break: a journey, usually by public transport, ‘concretized the transition [away] from routinized schedules’ and was ‘central to the accomplishment of the temporal shift’.¹³ The spatial and temporal ‘shift’ took people to the liminal leisure zone of the beach, which Shields describes as a carnivalesque Bank Holiday environment characterized by broad and indiscriminate social mixing, which liberated the body from disciplinary inscription:

[T]he carnivalesque operated precisely to dissolve the responsible and reasonable individual of Victorian morals into the common member of a mass community. The carnivalesque zone of the beach liberated subjects from the micro-powers encouraging the norms, propriety, and the social dressage of the industrial worker.[...] The explosion of ‘excessive’ behaviour and social pleasures and leisure forms which is found in the seaside carnival is a mark of resistant bodies which at least temporarily escape or exceed moral propriety.¹⁴

What Shields’ discussion highlights is the centrality of the grotesque carnivalesque body in the appalled response of so many Victorian commentators to mass leisure. His analysis draws on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, and its application by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White to bourgeois phobias around the city and the working-class body. It is this dynamic, of the elite observer-narrator, the fin-de-siècle leisure zone where there is mass transport and assembly, the open, consuming body of joyous immoderation, and the contaminations and inter-mixings of body and slum, that I attend to in the following chapters.

The complex intersections between the carnivalesque body, partaking of polluting recreational and courtship practices, and the porous, misshapen body of the slum, are not always apparent to scholars. In the course of his incisive study of the grotesque, consuming females to be found in late-Victorian slum fiction, Gill Davies

¹³ Rob Shields, *Places On the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 86.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.95.

asserts that in the Crystal Palace episode of *The Nether World*, George Gissing abandons naturalism for ‘a bizarre combination of mock-heroic and nightmare’ to produce ‘a spectacle of dehumanized monsters’.¹⁵ Setting aside the fact that the naturalism of Gissing’s novel accommodates the bizarre and the monstrous throughout, I suggest that the chapter in question - ‘Io Saturnalia’ - clarifies the horror of unclean bodily connection on which all fictions considered in this chapter turn. Even so, to identify and explore this paradigm of bodily degeneration does not reduce the peculiar complexities in Gissing’s treatment of the ways in which the past is present in the modern city. As Scott McCracken notes, a ‘dialectic of modernity’ is at work in Gissing’s text, in which the revelries taking place at Sydenham reproduce those of the antique world. McCracken’s reading, I suggest, highlights from a perspective compatible with my own the coincidence of the carnivalesque, social and joyous body present in the phantasmagoric city, with the leaking diseased grotesque of modernity, in the pages of *The Nether World*:

the ‘Io Saturnalia’ chapter [...] is not a straightforward degeneration narrative, where the modern is a travesty of the classical past. Instead, antiquity and the present co-exist in what [Walter] Benjamin calls *Jetztzeit*, the time of now, and nowhere is that co-temporality, more concentrated than in the spaces created by the great exhibition, themselves spaces that are enabled by the modern city.¹⁶

In its combination of the antique and the modern, the ‘Io Saturnalia’ chapter undoubtedly represents more than a ‘momentary unleashing of degenerate instincts.’¹⁷ The Bank Holiday is simultaneously ancient, or perhaps timeless - ‘a day of tragic mirth’ – and a modern, contingent experience to be purchased with ‘jingling [...] coin’ (104) at that archetypal Victorian leisure zone, the Crystal Palace. Savagery is embedded in the very modernity which co-exists with the classical past. It connects the crowd’s lawlessness to new modes of consumption and embodies, as one critic

¹⁵ Gill, pp. 70-71.

¹⁶ McCracken, ‘Between Dreamworlds’, p. 98.

¹⁷ Goode ‘Margaret Harkness,’ p.54.

suggests, ‘the very allure of modernity, with its primitive emancipation, its utopian yearnings, its outrageously excessive desires.’¹⁸

The journey to and from Sydenham in mass-produced finery constitutes the transition, from routinized time, into the heterotopic, which is achieved ‘by rites and purifications or by illusions of freedom’ – hence Gissing’s linking the finery to the pileus, the cap of freedom worn once a year by slaves in ancient Rome.¹⁹ Those illusions of freedoms are signified by the transformation of bodies into phantasmagorias. The Bank Holiday scenes are dominated by descriptions of the newly-accessible building-blocks of the city as spectacle: mass-produced ‘finery’ with its longstanding connotations of seduction, pollution and social threat. Pennyloaf’s outfit, ‘unwonted’ and new – but for her boots – is ‘fashionable’ and ‘lustrous’, her hat sporting the ‘reddest feather purchasable in the City Road’ (105). Clem Peckover is ‘gorgeously arrayed’ and ‘stately’ as she alights from the train at Sydenham; the narrator links her glamorous confidence to the figure of Delilah – as with the Medusa, one of a gallery of bloodthirsty females stalking the fin-de-siècle cultural imaginary (106). In a sense, Clem, that most destructive of figures, with her drolly drawn degeneracy and her status as mobile spectacle, epitomizes modernity. And it is not only women, consuming and sexualized, who partake of the glaring fashions available in London. The revellers’ apparel maps collective dreaming and competitive consumption across the city: Jack Bartley wears ‘[A] high hat – Bob never had owned one in his life – and about his neck was a tie of crimson; yellow was his waistcoat, even such a waistcoat as you may see in Pall Mall’ (106).

¹⁸ Villa, pp. 64–66.

¹⁹ Edward J. Soja, ‘Heterotopologies: A Remembrance Of Other Spaces in Citadel L.A.’ in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. by Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 13–34 (p. 16). See also Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p. 26. For the connections and differences between the pileus and the Phrygian cap, see Hertz.

As McCracken notes, the train journey from one part of the fragmented city to another constitutes in itself a dreamworld of mobility.²⁰ Yet this mobility is complicated by gender, by corporeal vulnerability at a site where social differentiation is abandoned: ‘No distinction between ‘classes’ today [on board the trains]; get in where you like, where you can’ (105). As Mary Russo reminds us, carnival, in its complicitous relations with dominant cultures, can present special dangers to women.²¹ On her return journey from the Palace, Pennyloaf suffers from the prevailing lack of physical boundaries – she is ‘dragged up from under a seat’, she is forced into a man’s ‘jovial embrace’, in a carriage full of people who ‘smoke and sing at the same time’, who ‘quarrel and make love – the latter in somewhat primitive fashion’ and ‘roll about with the rolling of the train’ (112). On the initial journey out to Sydenham, the orifices at which ‘the confines between the body and the world are overcome’, common to both Bakhtin’s carnivalesque body and phobic responses to the bodies of the poor, are in evidence. The cheapest massified cultures are literally swallowed and exhaled, through multiple, promiscuous mouths. Pennyloaf’s ‘dread’ of the beer bottle may be traceable, both to her mother’s alcoholism, and to the unregulated circulation of bodily fluids – in this case, saliva:

[The playing of a concertina] was the natural invitation to song, and all joined in the latest ditties learnt at the music-hall. Away they sped... the carriage dense with tobacco smoke. Ho for the bottle of muddy ale, passed round in genial fellowship from mouth to mouth! Pennyloaf would not drink of it; she had a dread of all such bottles [...] the young man with the concertina passed round his hat (106).

At the Crystal Palace, as the narrator choreographs scenes of ribaldry and intoxication, the carnival body emerges, grotesque, decentred, ringing with laughter, its disguises and reversals a medium for what Bakhtin calls its ‘intentionally upset

²⁰ McCracken ‘Between Dreamworlds’, p. 98.

²¹ Russo, p. 55.

proportions [... its] imagery of time and space.’²² With its abuses and jests, its noses signifying genitals – for in carnival the nose ‘always symbolises the phallus’ - its limbs straining and spaghettified, its multiple bodies driving downwards, it is, so far as the narrator is concerned, a spectacle of revulsion: ‘The young man who leads them has been going about all day with the lining of his hat turned down over his forehead; for the thousandth time those girls are screaming with laughter at the sight of him. Ha ha! He has slipped and fallen upon the floor [...] Lo! One of the funniest of the party is wearing a gigantic cardboard nose and flame-coloured whiskers’ (110). The description of the scene in the ‘Shilling Tea-room’, to which payment at the entrance entitles one to ‘all things to whomso could secure them in the conflict’ has clear evolutionary implications (108). The scene simultaneously conjures up a communal body with fluid borders, hell-bent on defiance of any and all propriety:

[T]hey were admitted to feed freely on all that lay before them... Along the gangways coursed perspiring waiters, heaping up giant structures of used plates and cups [...] Here practical joking found the most graceful of opportunities, whether it were the deft direction of a piece of cake at the nose of a person sitting opposite, or the emptying of a saucer down your neighbour’s back, or the ingenious jogging of an arm [...] On the whole there reigned a spirit of imbecile joviality (108).

The fairground, where the urban dwellers access corporeal excitements on swing-boats and merry-go rounds, is thick with dust. This substance, replete with scientific, religious, cultural and metaphoric connotations, hovers over the revellers’ heads in a ‘thick white wavering cloud’ (106). Invoking death’s atomizing processes, the dust of Sydenham underscores the merry-makers’ fragile, breathing, consuming embodiment. It covers them, so that, for that short ‘scattered island of time’ they parody in their whiteness (‘whitened from head to foot,’) those smooth, monumental bodies of the Crystal Palace which the crowd so comprehensively rejects (107-10).²³

²² Bakhtin, pp. 410-411.

²³ Ibid, p. 90.

Under that ‘glass canopy’, we are told, ‘How the dust rose from the trampled boards!’ (108). The carousing grotesque body drives relentlessly downwards, to the genitalia, to the digestion of the organic body by the earth: Pennyloaf dances to please Bob ‘though every moment it seems to her that she must sink to the ground in uttermost exhaustion’ (111).

It may be that this attention to dust indicates a phobia similar to that of John Ruskin. (After all, the narrative of *The Nether World*, casting the Crystal Palace as ‘the great ugly building’ (110), echoes Ruskin’s own response.) Ruskin was particularly revolted at the accumulation of waste between and beneath the floorboards of the Palace. In one important lecture, he connects this waste to the heterotopia’s preservation and abolition of time, space and culture – which he interprets as a distortion spatial, temporal and cultural boundaries, and a promiscuous mixing of the gathered bodies of classical aesthetics: ‘[There are] examples of sculpture filched indiscriminately from the past work, bad and good, of Turks, Greeks, Romans, Moors, and Christians, miscoloured, misplaced and misrepresented; here thrust into unseemly corners, and there morticed together into mere confusion of heterogeneous obstacle.’ Relief, Ruskin declared, was sought by the crowds in distractions including ‘beer and meat’, with ‘the corks and the bones being dropped through the chinks in the damp deal flooring of the English Fairy Palace.’²⁴ Thus Ruskin’s nauseated response to the organic matter lurking below the surface – quite literally, to the bones rotting beneath the veneer.²⁵

²⁴ John Ruskin, *Aratra Pentelici: Six Lectures on the Elements of Sculpture, Given Before the University of Oxford in Michaelmas Term 1870* (London: Allen, 1901), p. 56.

²⁵ Although neither Ruskin nor Gissing could know it, waste accumulated between and beneath the Palace’s floorboards would play a vital role in feeding the fire which destroyed it in 1936. Piggott, p. 207.

Gissing's dust could certainly be read as miasmic, evoking dirt, excrement, urban poisons, those discourses of the hygiene and differentiation, of the sewer and of prostitute, to which this thesis so frequently appeals (and from which Clara Hewett's veil will on some levels 'protect' her). Yet, as Kate Flint reminds us, 'Once one moves away from a definition of dust as dirt, its status becomes less stable.'²⁶ Flint's exploration of dust's metaphoric connections with the fear of social reversion alongside the 'dialectic contrast' to the dominant notion of progress offered by Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, has clear relevance to the concerns of this thesis. Here at Sydenham, in this elemental showcase of consumption, rejoice the decaying bodies of the slum, fragments of what remains – modernity's waste. In their transient finery, they sport the soon-to-be 'debris of mass culture'.²⁷

Carolyn Steedman, meanwhile, in considering the archive's role in criticism and historiography, argues that dust 'is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone.'²⁸ If the Crystal Palace revellers are indeed – in some sense - dust, then they are both vulnerable biological bodies, and a coarse, indestructible, ever-dying and ever-renewing ancestral body, in the midst of modernity. The notion of human waste as abortion, and as abortion which breathes, will emerge again shortly – as will the motif of the degenerate, consuming body that refuses to die.

In the face of all this, Gissing invokes the notion of Utopia, which, in the particular context of the Crystal Palace, presents a set of intersecting significations. In

²⁶ Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 47.

²⁷ Buck-Morss *Dialectics*, p.ix.

²⁸ Carolyn Steedman *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 164.

Foucault's lecture, the heterotopia - a 'real' space such as the fairground, functions as a counter-site, contrasting with the unreality of the utopia presenting society perfected or transformed.²⁹ While the work of Rob Shields emphasizes the socially regenerative elements in Bakhtin's carnivalesque vision, other scholars highlight the complex, often collaborative relations between carnival and dominant cultures – not least where the mobility and conceptualization of the female body is concerned.

Clearly, Gissing does not interpret the carnivalesque body in terms of liberation. His own revolutionary-utopian vision, framed as 'jesting in earnest,' imagines social and economic transformation as contingent on a termination of the carnivalesque through a benign subjugation of both the individual and the social body. Music the 'civiliser' should 'humanise the multitude', and 'with Orphean magic raise in perfected beauty the towers of the City of Man' (109). That Gissing is reduced to fantasy, rather than political, solutions to the poverty and cruelty he observes in the city, reflects in part dismissal of the claims of environments such as the Crystal Palace to educate and improve the masses: on the contrary, for Gissing, mass leisure not only fails to improve, but coarsens its participants. The Great Exhibition and its effective extension at Sydenham were originally conceived as fulfilling a 'didactic and elevating role' and born of a 'utopian spectacle' marketing 'the routines and sanitary commodities of the liberal society as an escape from physical abjection.'³⁰ While, in Walter Benjamin's formulations, the Exhibition's educational project and its promises of social advance were always bound up with a reactionary manipulation of working-

²⁹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 24.

³⁰ Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', *New Formations* 4 (1988), 73-102.

class consciousness, Gissing has his own apprehensions about the narratives of progress on offer to the crowds.³¹

The Crystal Palace was initially viewed as manifestation of progress, not least through its range of cased and freestanding anthropological displays. It is here, amid the ageing phantasmagoria of evolution, that Gissing's narrator surveys the multitude. In that multitude he identifies layers of organic time - the process through which, in the modern, industrialized city, the desired object sours and regresses. No less than Lloyd Lester at the Bow factory of Bryant and May, Gissing is informed by the principles of mass spectacle and bodily display. In *The Nether World*, however, exhibitionary optics facilitate the observation, not of the body benignly disciplined by capitalist technologies, but of corporeal slum horror in the mass, and in the individual.

As the narrator delivers his 'great review of the People,' the collective carnivalesque body resolves into its constituent anatomies. If, as Luisa Villa suggests, 'the idea of a different multitude' liberated from 'the inhuman order of the city' hovers behind Gissing's representation of the holiday crowd, the members of that alternative crowd appear to be mainly female.³² This 'great review' explicates the dialectic relations between the desirable body of the impoverished workgirl – the precarious body of youth and health dressed in holiday finery – and the loathsome, bestial figure she must, in this representation, become. The Crystal Palace thus hosts vistas of decline – a decline both ascribed to the environment and expressed through images of animality, of reversion.³³

³¹ See Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, [G5,2] [G5a,1] [G6; G6 a,1] [G16, 6] [G16, 7], pp. 182-4; Buck-Morss *Dialectics*, pp. 86-89; Richards, p.19.

³² Villa, p. 68.

³³ Philip Landon, 'Great Exhibitions: Representations of the Crystal Palace in Mayhew, Dickens, and Dostoevsky', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 20 (1997), 27-59 (pp. 30-42).

See how worn-out the poor girls are becoming, how they gape, what listless eyes most of them have! The stoop in the shoulders so universal among them merely means overtoil in the workroom. Not one in a thousand shows the elements of taste in dress; vulgarity and worse glares in but every costume. Observe the middle-aged women; it would be small surprise that their good looks had vanished but whence comes it that they are animal, repulsive, absolutely vicious in ugliness? Mark the men in their turn: four in every six have visages so deformed by ill-health that they excite disgust [...] their legs are twisted out of shape by evil conditions of life from birth upwards... They are pretty, so many of these girls [...] the heart sinks as one sees them side by side with the men who are to be their husbands (109-110).

The narrator's rendering of the youthful, yet already-degenerating female body is shot though, not only with horror and anxiety, but with desire – as much a desire for what the youthful body might, yet cannot, become, as what it *is*. The forms of young girls 'gape', and the narrative slips between their 'worn-out' frames and the 'glares' of their massified costumes. Yet they are 'delicate of feature, graceful,' and their bodies suggest contrasting potentialities. There is a dreamt-of body of health and propriety, unrealisable in practice for London's exploited workers; and there is the destiny of decay and reversion to a state 'animal, repulsive, absolutely vicious in ugliness' (109). And as Gissing follows his protagonists home to Clerkenwell from the intoxications of Sydenham, their decay also begins.

**'DOUGHEY-LIMBED ABORTIONS':
INFANT HORROR IN GISSING'S CLERKENWELL**

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas's analysis of Rhoda Broughton's 1867 novel *Not Wisely But Too Well* assists us in thinking through the movement between heterotopia and slum in terms of an oscillation between surface and depth. Key to Talairach-Vielmas's analysis is her identification of the dialectical relationship between the shopping arcade frequented by the youthful female body, and the slum and its grotesque female

inhabitant. I suggest a similar dynamic is fundamental to the fin-de-siècle slum fictions discussed in this thesis, which plot a 'journey through femininity,' from lithe, desiring consumer to shapeless (de)generative slum form.³⁴ In the following discussion, I explore the ways in which the carnivalesque body of impoverished femininity, swathed in and consuming urban poisons, infected by the touch of the slum male, degenerates into another kind of excessive body. Once confined to the slum, the female form reproduces and spreads the city's contaminations and regression through the delivery of new life that is already dead.

On Pennyloaf's return to Clerkenwell, Clem Peckover rends 'half [her] garments from her back', then tears her face 'until the blood streamed'. Meanwhile Bob Hewett and Jack Bartley fight nearby 'like wild animals' before a ring of 'delighted spectators' (112). The trope of the public fight is common to all of the texts scrutinized in this chapter and the chapter which follows - and such episodes are more than mere spectacles of exotic violence. Emma Liggins rightly asserts that, in the face of Bob Hewett's misconduct and Clem's 'bestiality', Pennyloaf's sobs 'testify to her frustration at being out of control of her own leisure experiences.'³⁵ More than this, however, the accessible fashions of heterotopic excess have been brutally and symbolically torn from the young slum wife's body. As one critic notes, 'festive clothes are reduced to rags (as if to underscore the fact that servants cannot wear the 'pileus' for more than a single day).'³⁶ Moreover, that these festivities and their garb are shown to be so 'fleeting', 'transient' and 'precarious' is bound up with the way in which, in her failure to 'get over' the Bank Holiday, Pennyloaf replicates the

³⁴ Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 104-108.

³⁵ Liggins, *George Gissing*, p. 59.

³⁶ Villa, p. 67.

experience of her mother.³⁷ That is to say, on returning from the Crystal Palace, Pennyloaf reconnects with a feminine slum-time measured in a bodily decay which is accelerated by trauma, multiparity, violence

[Pennyloaf] sank down on the bare floor and wept. You could not have recognised her; her pretty face was all blood and dirt. [...] An hour later [...] A woman's voice was raised in the fury of mad drunkenness, and a man answered her with threats and blows. 'That's mother,' sobbed Pennyloaf. 'I knew she wouldn't get over today. She never did get over a Bank-holiday (113).

It is not only in the clawing open of her flesh that Pennyloaf's form begins to lose its smooth definition. For in her very unrecognisability, she reproduces the indistinction of her mother's face, 'battered into shapelessness' by Pennyloaf's father (76). And reproduction, after all, is at the centre of the novel's disquiet concerning slum femininity and social body. As I have claimed elsewhere, *The Nether World* presents the synthetic and organic horrors of the city alike in terms suggesting the circulation of venereal disease. In these fictions, the working-class male touch can never signal simple affection; it is only ever salacious and destructive.

Images of violence tend to be central to slum fiction, and Pennyloaf's marriage (inevitably) reproduces the violence which characterizes her parents' relationship. Previously, I have explored the sequence in which Pennyloaf hungers for toxic puddings at display windows in Rosoman Street, the same thoroughfare in which her mother purchases the legal poison of alcohol. The notion of the prostitute as the offspring of drunken parents, connecting social diseases such as alcoholism and syphilis, was embedded in degenerationist discourses, Lamarckian, metaphorical, or otherwise, and the motif of the drunken, immoral mother is a significant recurring

³⁷ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 26.

element in the decline-plots discussed in this chapter.³⁸ But it is not only in the relations between Pennyloaf, her husband and her mother that the narrator fashions morbid links between slum bodies.

In a novel which asserts the questionable motivation of much philanthropic activity, Jane Snowdon's 'womanly influence' and sympathy lead her into the streets in order to promote – with varying degrees of success – marital harmony. One visit by Jane occasions the vivid depiction of the slums, and the bodies within, as unstable, indistinct, porous. Interior and exterior, childhood and adulthood, are lost in the flow anatomical matter. However, rather than the vigorous regenerative connections of the carnivalesque, these intersections signify termination. And Pennyloaf is located in the centre - as a source - of an amalgam of unclean forms:

The visit she wished to pay took her into a disagreeable quarter, a street of squalid houses, swarming with yet more squalid children. On all the doorsteps sat little girls, themselves only just out of infancy, nursing or neglecting bald, red-eyed, doughy-limbed abortions in every stage of babyhood, hapless spawn of diseased humanity [...] it was necessary to squeeze through a conglomerate of dirty little bodies. [...] On Pennyloaf's lap was one more specimen of the infinitely-multiplied baby, and a child of two years sprawled behind her on the landing (129-30).

Clearly, these raw, distorted entities, generated by open anatomical slum bodies, are opposed to the disciplined body of classical aesthetics; but, in its specific imagery of abortion and of unregulated multiplication ('spawn[ing]'), the text figures the female body as reproducing the city's poisons. As a relentless increase of 'disease' meets the 'swarming' of newly-produced bodies, despair, insufficiency and waste are coded as abortion. Moreover, the image of the afflicted infant, of incompleteness, points towards a particularly destructive form of bodily connection. As Eileen Yeo has

³⁸ See Sander L. Gilman, "I'm Down on Whores": Race and Gender in Victorian London', in *Anatomy of Racism* ed. by David Theo Goldberg ed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) pp.146-170; Pick, p. 195

argued, the fixation with heredity and reproduction in later nineteenth-century scientific and social discourses continued an emphasis on the lower bodily strata which had characterized earlier conceptions of the social and individual body. What Yeo calls ‘an obsession with excrement and prostitution’ was, of course, bound up with fear of disease and the penetration of the body’s boundaries.³⁹

As Elaine Showalter’s important consideration of the ‘central symbolic role’ played by syphilis in the fiction of the 1890s highlights, late-Victorian feminist analyses of male vice cast the disease as ‘an eruption of repressed desire, the surfacing of a secret life’. In contrast, the male ‘syphilophobic fantasy’ of the period figured the vagina dentata as ‘infected and unclean.’⁴⁰ The syphilitic infant, ‘apish’ and ‘shrivelled’, appearing across a range of fin-de-siècle fictions, embodies the elasticity of degenerationist notions. The infant might stand for the degenerative impact of male vice – as in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893). Or it might serve as ‘signifier of the conflict, lies, and hypocrisies of the social system’ as in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895).⁴¹ If through the nineteenth century ‘Prostitution [...] focussed anxieties associated with industrialization and capitalism more generally’, Gissing’s text implicates the urban marital-maternal body in the circulation of disease.⁴² As its title suggests, *The Nether World* is greatly concerned with the lower bodily strata. One wonders, in light of Pennyloaf’s exposure to the adulterous Bob Hewett’s threatening and perhaps infecting touch, what the disease of ‘diseased humanity’ might actually be.

³⁹ Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*, pp. 187-193.

⁴⁰ Elaine Showalter, ‘Syphilis, Sexuality, and the Fiction of the Fin de Siècle’, in *Sex, Politics and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by Ruth Yazell (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp 88- 99.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 107.

⁴² Poovey *Making*, p.88.

Eugene S. Talbot's arrangement of the images of flawed fetuses – 'cyclopean monstrosities' which he links to the human being's ascidian ancestors, themselves little more than hungry mucosoid orifices - reminds us that the awry foetus was cast in more reductive biological discourse as fleshly spectacle of degeneracy.⁴³ Indeed, Gissing's violent and reversionary imagery of miscarriage, of the amphibian and the aquatic, invites the broadest cultural and biological readings. Elizabeth K. Menon has discussed the multiplicity of dark connotations conveyed by the image of the fetus in a range of French and British graphic art during the nineteenth century: as 'flexible signifier', it could denote degeneration as 'the result of the birth process and heredity or of outside agents, such as alcoholism, and, more generally, decadence and the degradation of the social fabric.' Or it might refer to 'the lightning-rod for such fears – feminism'.⁴⁴ *The Nether World*, enacting its own discussion of these social and biological concerns, generates the trope of the fetus, the unstable, doughy, boundlessly suggestive abortion, just as it generates the slum femme fatales to which this abortion is so closely related. The work of Aubrey Beardsley, for whom the image of the embryo or abortion held particular interest, will be touched upon in the next chapter. For the moment, my focus is the evolutionary implications of the abortion, within analogical scientific paradigms, as a failure to evolve.

As William Greenslade notes, the notion of recapitulation, while admitting a casual association between vastly different organisms, 'offered a plausible explanation for defective structure, in terms of incompleteness and insufficiency'.⁴⁵ In recapitulation theory, after all, the embryo is the human centre in which stages of progress lead

⁴³ Eugene S. Talbot, *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs and Results* (n.p., 1898), p. 33.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth K. Menon, 'Anatomy of a Motif: The Fetus in Late-Nineteenth-Century Graphic Art', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture*, 3: 1 (2004) <<http://www.19thcentury-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring04/283-anatomy-of-a-motif-the-fetus-in-late-19th-century-graphic-art>> [accessed 10 April 2013].

⁴⁵ Greenslade, *Degeneration*, p. 69.

towards the evolutionary apex of the elite European male. Susan J. Navarette's insightful discussion of withered late-Victorian infants includes a detailed examination of Walter de la Mare's 1895 tale of horror, 'A.B.O.' Navarette explores the ways in which de la Mare's story reworks discourses of evolutionary biology and concepts of recapitulation - whether propounded by Herbert Spencer or by Ernst Haeckel - through the motif of the 'biological throwback' or shrivelled abortion which is delivered from an earthy tomb to run amok. 'The monstrosity of de la Mare's aborted fetus [...] is a function of its humanity because it displays atavistic horrors always present in embryo but removed from sight in the fully gestated human body that has had time to 'compose' itself.'⁴⁶ In fabricating breathing abortions which have issued from the debilitated yet powerfully reproductive body of the slum female, Gissing's novel suggests atavisms exposed to daylight, and brings the maternal body into simultaneous, connected engagement with evolutionary time and with urban disease.

The same system of biological analogy which powers the trope of blighted infancy, informs the representation of Pennyloaf herself: the abortion and the slum female are intelligible in terms of one another. While her 'wasted' features testify to environmental assault, Pennyloaf's body testifies to a failure to mature or evolve: she lacks 'womanly' attributes in spite of lactation, and sports an 'immature' voice and 'irresponsible' physiognomy. Effectively, the grown woman is a big child. The act of breastfeeding, that most elemental and nourishing connection between bodies, is rendered, in this context, troubling – or at least ambiguous.

It is significant that, as she deteriorates physically, Pennyloaf aims to attract her husband back to her through play with memory, expressed in an appeal to that precious

⁴⁶ Navarette, pp. 63- 65; *ibid*, p. 89; Kuryluk, p. 107.

break with traditional time, the Bank Holiday. The narrative play with the dialectic of massified surface and (de)generative abyss in the following passage is inspired: the dress opened for breastfeeding is glaringly massified, Pennyloaf's hair, in the midst of poisonous bodily connection, is dressed 'as if for a holiday', her cheeks are daubed, not with cosmetics, but with the pressure exerted by the baby, which has emerged from her slippery organic depths:

Hastily, she drew together the front of her dress, which for the baby's sake had been wide open, and rose to her feet. Pennyloaf was not a bit more womanly in figure than on the day of her marriage; her voice was still an immature treble; the same rueful irresponsibility marked her features; but all her poor prettiness was wasted away under the disfigurement of pains and cares. Incongruously enough, she wore a gown of brightly-coloured calico [...] her hair was dressed as if for a holiday, a daub recently made on her cheeks by the baby's fingers (130).

David Trotter denies biological degeneracy in slum heroines such as Pennyloaf, or Kipling's Badalia Herodsfoot, or Morrison's Elizabeth Hunt, or Maugham's Elizabeth Kemp. He suggests rather that 'Heredity returned with a vengeance in the New Woman novels which began to appear in the 1880s' and that one manifestation of this return was the appearance in such novels of 'The deformed child [which] was a popular motif in naturalist fiction, incarnating degeneracy.'⁴⁷ It is not only Gissing's multivalent abortions, in their fleshly and biological connection with the bodies of the slum wives of Clerkenwell, however, which argue against the idea that organic morbidity is absent from these slum texts.

⁴⁷ Trotter *English Novel*, pp. 117-8.

**SOCIAL MOTHERHOOD AMID THE SCUM OF THE BARRALONG:
RUDYARD KIPLING'S 'THE RECORD OF BADALIA HERODSFOOT'**

Rudyard Kipling's short story 'The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot' is a tale of fringes without feathers. The heroine's engagement with modernity is explored through involvement in structured cross-organizational philanthropy rather than enjoyment of, then maternal exclusion from, liminal leisure zones. The economy in which Badalia acts is one of pawn-shops and competition for charity such as the port wine which she carries 'through an eternally thirsty land' (285), a zone of darkness frequented by missionaries for whom the modern city's gas-lamps stand as 'their sun' and 'the Covent Garden wains [are] the chariots of midnight' (288).

Kipling's depictions of working-class characters have been framed by scholars as a vital bridge between high Victorian realism and the social realism of the 1890s. In an important commentary on 'Badalia Herodsfoot', Peter Keating suggests that although the story is grim, it forms a vital contribution to Kipling's progressive representation of the working classes in fiction and poetry. Acknowledging the similarity of 'Badalia Herodsfoot' to *The Nether World* in terms of subject matter and atmosphere, Keating lauds its 'technique', a tone of indifference, of lethargy, a striving after 'objectivity' informed by continental naturalism. In Keating's view, Kipling's short story works to demonstrate that 'working-class life, even in its most debased aspect, possessed values of its own which the onlooker can never really understand.'⁴⁸ More recently, Roger Henkle has read the slum fabricated by Kipling and later by Morrison, as constituting 'its own social order: a subsystem of gender relations that

⁴⁸ Keating, *Working Classes*, pp. 151.

exert a power within their own domain that cannot be interpolated into bourgeois categories of self-agency.’⁴⁹

However (and long before Deborah Nord contended that the putative ‘objectivity’ of the slum fictions produced by Kipling and Morrison neglected the ‘class relations that provide an analysis or interpretation of poverty and degradation’), Adrian Poole took issue with Keating’s positive assessment, and with a similar interpretation advanced by H. J. Dyos.⁵⁰ Poole wrote that, ‘The perniciousness of the notion that these of any other writers somehow record an unmediated ‘way of life’ that is allowed to ‘speak for itself’ really deserves more detailed exposure,’ and asserted that the fictions of writers such as Kipling and Morrison only served to confirm the gulf between reader and working-class object of scrutiny.⁵¹

Agreeing with the assessments of Poole and Nord, I now take a brief turn into the central London slum as written by Kipling. In spite its lack of phantasmagoric sites, my reading of ‘Badalia Herodsfoot’ discloses the presence in the text of bodies made grotesque by past pleasurable excess and gross reproduction, close by sites of spectacle and prostitution, and subject to degeneration through bodily contact with the slum male. Moreover, close attention to ‘Badalia’ is rewarded by a rich commentary on the concept of womanly influence working to heal the degenerate anatomical and social body. Kipling’s narrative clarifies the central role played by the touch of working-class masculinity in so many fin-de-siècle narratives of slum degeneracy, and the ways in which that touch is bound up with transformation of the healthy feminine

⁴⁹ Dan Bivona, and Roger B. Henkle, *The Imagination of Class: Masculinity and the Victorian Urban Poor* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2006), p. 107.

⁵⁰ H. J. Dyos, ‘The Slums of Victorian London’, *Victorian Studies*, 11 (1967), pp.5-40.

⁵¹ Nord, *Walking* p. 194; Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), p.52.

body into leaking horror. This in turn bolsters a key argument made in this second part of the thesis – that exposure to the city’s spectacles in some slum narratives is twinned with the destructive and infecting touch of impoverished masculinity. This double exposure, this touch, stymies the regenerative potential of its female victims.

‘Badalia Herodsfoot’ plots the near-escape of its heroine from the brutal attentions of slum masculinity. The attempt fails, and as Badalia’s body is rendered a leaking mess, she is reconnected with the figure of the prostitute. As Badalia herself puts it, ‘Women’s cruel put upon in Gunnison Street.’⁵² Like Gissing’s *The Nether World*, ‘Badalia Herodsfoot’ positions the inhabitants of the slum in layers of time, referencing both the time of individual biological ageing, and evolutionary time. It presents images of the urban poor as culturally ‘aboriginal,’ asserting that ‘[T]he customs of Gunnison Street [...] do not differ from those of the Barralong’ (280). Kipling described the area surrounding Villiers Street, just off the Strand, where he lived immediately following his arrival in England in 1891, as ‘four packed miles of seething vice’ and as a ‘shifting, shouting brotheldom.’⁵³ In the text of ‘Badalia’, set in this precise area, the female bodies exhibit a social and organic deviancy. They form a chain of unstable, secreting forms from whose inner workings emerge, over time, addiction, syphilis, reversion, and the foulest expulsions of childbirth.

From the story’s opening lines, Kipling skilfully writes his eponymous heroine as implicated in a costermonger culture long accorded a distinctive racial or animalistic identity, linked to dangerous sensuality, vigour and to forms of mobility and exchange

⁵² Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot’, in Rudyard Kipling, *Many Inventions* (London: MacMillan, 1893), pp. 279-308 (p283); subsequent page numbers will appear in parentheses in the main text.

⁵³ David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London: John Murray 2002), p. 89.

perceived - as Catherine Gallagher has argued – as parasitic on the properly labouring body.⁵⁴ Kipling's text links the barrow, symbol of coster subsistence, with promiscuity as the reader first encounters Badalia making a spectacle of herself - 'a specifically feminine danger,' as Susan Russo reminds us.⁵⁵ Dancing on a makeshift platform, Badalia holds aloft the paraffin lamps associated with the marketplace and the fairground, before engaging boisterously with the forces of law and order:

In the beginning of things she had been unregenerate; had worn the heavy fluffy fringe which is the ornament of the costermonger's girl, and there is a legend that on her wedding-day she, a flare-lamp in either hand, danced dances on a discarded lover's winkle-barrow, till a policeman interfered, and then Badalia danced with the Law amid shoutings. These were her days of fatness, and they did not last long, for her husband after two years took himself another woman, and passed out of Badalia's life, over Badalia's senseless body; for he stifled protest with blows (279).

The narrator begins to tell the story of declining femininity – 'her days of fatness' are brief – but then, following a destructive encounter with the male slum body, the marriage appears to end. There is ambivalence in the narrative, a portentous inference: Badalia may regard her abusive marriage as constituting her 'fatness,' rather than as terminating it. What is key here, however, is the way in which Badalia sets about extending a disciplining maternalism to the neighbourhood as a whole and 'doing for herself' as she puts it, once she is deserted and is 'enjoying her widowhood' (279). Because she has been deserted and her child has died of croup, these activities are isolated from subjection to male violence, debilitating or threatening reproduction, and maternal responsibility. These activities and her attitude to matrimony are represented as atypical of her class. We are told that 'With rare fidelity she listened to no proposals for a second marriage according to the customs of Gunnison street' (280).

⁵⁴ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work*, 4 vols (London: George Woodfall & Son, 1851), I, pp. 1-61; John Thomson and Adolphe Smith, *Street Life in London* (London: Sampson Low 1877), pp. 1-3.

⁵⁵ Russo, p. 54.

Some of the occupations with which Badalia is connected – laundry work and flower-selling – were popularly associated with heavy drinking and prostitution; moreover, reforming prostitutes were routinely employed in laundry work (280).⁵⁶ To be sure, Badalia minds children – presumably because their mothers are working – and recourse to the mangle positions her as ‘widow.’ But less savoury implications are evidenced by the narrator’s insistence that Badalia, possessed of foresight, refrains from drinking on the return journey from flower selling at the Burlington Arcade ‘very far westward’ (in fact a fifteen-minute walk from Covent Garden), phantasmagoric site of consumption and prostitution. The narrator, apparently accepting Badalia’s respectability on its own terms, tells us that she dispenses ‘rude counsel’ to those of ‘her sisterhood’ who drink in this way (280).⁵⁷

While the text does reflect the range of casual work undertaken by impoverished women in London, it represents a local economy in which females could live independent and rewarding lives on the proceeds of casual or seasonal labour. It is arguable that in London, no such economy existed.⁵⁸ Both the physical realities of sweated labour, and the possibility of lack of employment, are absent from the text. Thus is Badalia set in contrast with those who are indolent or diseased and lacking in self-reliance, that is, every other resident of Gunnison Street encountered in the story.

⁵⁶ Jones, p. 40; Patricia E. Malcolmson, *English Laundresses: A Social History, 1850-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); August, pp. 84-85; Carl Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 112-113; Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 90-93; Bartley *Prostitution*, pp. 52-53; Mayhew, pp. 134-136; ‘Tempted London: Young Women. No. 1: Flower Girls,’ *British Weekly*, 4th May 1888, p. 11; E.C. Grey, ‘Covent Garden’ in *Life and Labour of the People in London* vol. 1, edited by Charles Booth, 4 vols (London: Macmillan & Co. 1892) I, 192-204.

⁵⁷ Trudgill, Eric, ‘Prostitution and Paterfamilias: in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, 2 vols, ed. by Dyos and Wolff (London: Routledge, 1999), I, pp. 693-705.

⁵⁸ Jones, pp. 83-87; August, pp.140-141.

Badalia's reformatory activities, then, are well underway by the time she encounters the Reverend Eustace Hanna, an elite philanthropic worker active on Gunnison Street. During this initial meeting she upbraids him for an uninformed and counter-productive distribution of coveted alms such as custards, port wine and blankets. Clearly equipped with precious local knowledge and the zeal to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor, Badalia is she recognised by Hanna as having 'the soul of a fellow-worker' (281). From here on, Badalia sets to work dispensing the materials of philanthropy. At first these materials consist merely of blankets, confections and victuals, but she is soon entrusted with a grant for which she keeps written accounts, as a variety of organizations place confidence in her evaluation of potential recipients. Freed from the regular confinement of the slum mother, Badalia works to alleviate the suffering of the surviving babies of Gunnison Street. The text presents such regenerative activity as a possibility for working-class women who have been deserted or who remain celibate – for Badalia's desertion offers a pause, as it were, in the trajectory of decline.

It is a mistake to suppose, as Peter Keating has done, that she acts entirely upon 'a simple conviction that those who are suffering should be helped.'⁵⁹ To be sure, Badalia tells Mrs Jessel, the Secretary of the Tea Cup Board, that paupers want food, not religion, and that it is impossible to pauperize (demoralize) 'them that 'asn't things to begin with' (283). Nevertheless, Badalia's core value to local philanthropists is that she uses insights and knowledge produced by her class position to assess 'matters of personal character, right to relief' (282). Indeed, she slaps the face of one Mr Poone, an unemployed man she finds 'out looking for work,' whose wife is confined following childbirth; with confidence, Badalia decries him as a 'bone-idle beggar.' (285)

⁵⁹ Keating, *Working Classes*, p. 150.

Badalia's methods of discipline, then, involve the threat, and practice, of physical violence. These practices can hardly be theorised as the subtle, 'quiet' coercion of bourgeois discipline.

It has been suggested that as working-class communities 'settled' in the late nineteenth century, a neighbourhood 'matriarchy' developed, internalizing or producing notions of respectability. Carl Chinn, for example, discusses growing matriarchal 'power' in poor urban communities in military terms – as a 'generalship'.⁶⁰ Notably, Badalia's maternal mission is chronicled in military terms as she writes 'the story of her war; boldly, as befits a general'; she is described subsequently as being 'invaded' by the hostile force of one deviant neighbour, whom she fights and subsequently wraps 'in the war-clouds of her wrath' before again going 'out to war... the hosts of the enemy were many' (284; 287). At the same time, Badalia is acting as agent for elite philanthropic organizations, and the (bourgeois) domestic narrative towards the reform of the poor and their environment in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶¹

Though Badalia is not engaged in structured social investigation, her charitable activities involve a perceived 'right to look' at her immediate social environment, and underscores a particular 'sense of entitlement' involving not so much class privilege as an assumed privilege deriving from a sense of respectability, and of civic or moral responsibility.⁶² One could read in Badalia's 'motherly' yet stern cajoling of those in receipt of charity, in her anxiety regarding indiscriminate almsgiving, in her entry into others' homes to assess and to reward or withhold, something like those activities in

⁶⁰ Chinn, pp. 112-113.

⁶¹ Poovey, *Uneven*, pp. 170-197.

⁶² Nava, p. 43.

which middle-class (single) women developed the language of motherhood beyond the domestic sphere, to engage in social casework and investigation. This phenomenon has been discussed by cultural historians in terms of bourgeois ‘social’ or ‘civic’ motherhood.⁶³

I refer to these interrelated contexts of working-class matriarchy and middle-class maternalism, because Kipling combines elements of both in Badalia’s social motherhood, and he founds his heroine’s capacity for her activities upon her celibacy. Her maternalism contrasts absolutely with the forms of biological motherhood which occur in the text, and which dominate the lives of most of the fictional slum women discussed in this second part of the thesis. As Badalia confronts the ‘girl-wife,’ the impoverished reproductive female emerges as the site at which ameliorable thoughtlessness meets a burgeoning putrescence: ‘She, magnifying her office, faced the drunken husband; coaxed the doubly shiftless, thriftless girl-wife into a little forethought, and begged clothes when and where she could for the scrofulous babes that multiplied like the green scum on the untopped water-cisterns’ (290). Thus the slum and its open bodies spawn babies, cast as residue, linked to excrement and the stratum of the lower body.

William Greenslade has suggested that, ‘The lowest of the urban poor were figured as shit, which in literal terms overwhelmed the efforts of sanitary reform of the nineteenth-century city’.⁶⁴ Indeed, as with Pennyloaf’s breastfeeding in the Clerkenwell of *The Nether World*, there is an ambiguity about Badalia’s supply of

⁶³ Yeo, *Contest for Social Science*; Seth Koven, ‘Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action, and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840 to 1914’ in *Mothers of A New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. by Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp.94-135.

⁶⁴ Greenslade, p. 49.

clothing to children who are associated with scum, with threatening multiplication. For the secreting bodies of Gunnison Street are fearful sites of the intersection of multiple social cultural and biological threats: the productions which pass across their boundaries are pollution. The slum written by Kipling is rife with those diseases of oozing inflammation – scrofula, tuberculosis, whooping cough, diphtheria – so often cited, with syphilis, as cause and effect of degeneracy.⁶⁵ In her outlining of abjection as a corporeal blend of fear, disgust and identification, Julia Kristeva distinguishes between two schematic types of ‘polluting objects’ related to bodily orifices. Observing that tears and sperm have no polluting value, she writes:

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life and death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social and sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference.⁶⁶

It is precisely because her own oozing baby has died of croup, because she is no longer threatened with diseased and debilitating multiparity by her own ‘drunken husband’ that Badalia stands as urban cure, as social mother. In her abstemious childlessness, she contrasts with her principal slum foe, a drink-addled crone whose abject form has produced Lascar Loo, a dying prostitute. In the relation of aged mother to daughter, threatening fecundity and morbid sterility meet. With her chronic coughing and her ‘living on one lung and the memory of past excesses’ (289), the invalided Lascar Loo embodies the excess of carnival and its deleterious effects,

⁶⁵ For the diphtheria epidemic in Europe c. 1890. See George Rosen ‘Disease, Debility and Death in the Victorian City’ in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* 2 vol, (1999), II pp. 625-667 (p. 653).

⁶⁶ Kristeva, p. 71.

presenting the prostitute's form as sexualized generator of disease - what Mary Spongberg has characterized as 'a site of abnormal indulgence.'⁶⁷

The repellent multiparity of Lascar Loo's mother is disclosed during a fit of delirium tremens, during which she calls 'on the names of children long since slain by dirt and neglect' (287). Here the narrator is talking the language of a developing Imperial maternalism which blamed (some) working class mothers for the high incidence of child mortality. Anna Davin's assertion is as applicable to 'The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot' as it is to the work of the Ladies' Sanitary Association: '[I]nfant mortality was clearly connected to poverty... but poverty was the fault of the individual, not an intrinsic part of a class society... [This was] the doctrine of maternal fault.'⁶⁸

Meanwhile the pugnacity and lack of refinement which aid the childless Badalia's regenerative mission is shown as repulsive in the pregnant and crapulent Jenny, Tom's new 'wife.' Jenny is positioned in a culture of widespread male-on-female battery; she compares her bruises with those of other women and confronts Tom publicly on the street, exposing his conduct to the judgment of their neighbours. Underscoring the relationship of slum reproduction with unrestrained sexuality, Jenny tears open her bodice and exposes her bruised breasts to a policeman (293-4). However, Badalia's cultural and economic correspondence with Jenny, the very thing that renders her 'social work' so effective, is carefully constrained by the narrator. Indeed, Badalia only interacts with the rest of Gunnison Street while performing her 'social work' – so that she remains both a brilliantly drawn individual, and effectively

⁶⁷ Mary Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease: the Body of the Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 45.

⁶⁸ Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop*, 5 (1978), 9-66 (p.54).

insulated from the story's cast of social waste. Despite Badalia's telling Mrs Jessel that 'I'm Gunnison Street', she is represented as essentially different from others in her community (282).

What is at stake in this story is the limitation which Badalia's gender and class position, combined with her marital status, places upon her participation in civic life. The endemic violence of Badalia's world renders her own particular 'struggle to escape the status of spectacle', despite gendered association with 'the very emblems of poverty, disease and fallenness', a literal matter of life and death.⁶⁹ As Andrew August notes in responding to Carl Chinn's concept of a communal matriarchy, 'The authority of neighbourhood women chiefly operated in a network of women and children.'⁷⁰

In seeking some form of social diagnosis, Kipling's text laments Badalia's domination by her husband, whose unemployment is explained in terms of idleness, alcohol abuse and lack of forethought. In his drunken befuddlement he enacts - in contrast with Badalia - the chaotic habits of thought identified by commentators such as Helen Bosanquet as causes of poverty.⁷¹ Economics are pertinent only insofar as Tom function as an index of social and fiscal irresponsibility, traversing London, spreading his semen among as many unfortunate women as he can 'marry'. In stripping the two rooms he shares with Jenny at Hennessy's Rents and selling the goods to buy whisky, he quite literally dismantles domesticity from within (291). A 'wreck' which drunkenness will 'swamp', Tom leaves Jenny and returns to Gunnison Street to confront Badalia. The circularity of the nether world through which he moves,

⁶⁹ Nord, *Walking*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ August, pp. 134-5.

⁷¹ See for example Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*; Bosanquet, *The Standard of Life and Other Studies*; Helen Bosanquet, 'Wages and Housekeeping' in *Methods of Social Advance: Short Studies in Social Practice by Various Writers*, ed. by C.S. Loch (London: MacMillan, 1904), pp.131-146.

its dark separation from the world of productive capitalist activity, is expressed in his very footsteps: 'He reached the traffic-polished black asphalt of a side-street and trod warily among the reflections of the shop-lamps that burned in gulfs of pitchy darkness, fathoms beneath his boot-heels' (296).

At the same time as Tom, privileged by his masculinity, is making his way from Hennessy's Rents, Lascar Loo's mother is asking Badalia, 'D'you think Loo's never bilked a man in her life?' In linking the distribution of custards and beef tea to Lascar-Loo's sexual-monetary transactions, Lascar Loo's mother makes the first in a rapid series of assertions implicating Badalia in prostitution. The mother then falls onto the pavement outside Badalia's lodgings and calls 'upon the devil to slay Badalia' (297). She is answered by the arrival of 'a man with a very pale face' – Tom. Thus the narrator defines the man's malice and violence as simultaneously inherent and as supernatural. Lascar Loo's mother proceeds to tell him that Badalia is now being 'kept' as the curate's mistress: 'She's that set up you wouldn't know 'er.' (298)

Badalia, whose surveillant practices have regulated the impoverished families of Gunnison Street, is now subjected to a crude chauvinistic scrutiny: 'Wot are you doin' with any trust that your 'usband don't know of?' (300). Social motherhood is slandered by one bent on reducing Badalia to a sexualized body, a 'public woman'. Prostitution figures specifically as conduit between social classes, as Tom justifies his assault on Badalia on grounds of social-sexual provocation: she has been, he later tells Jenny, 'livin' on the fat o' the land among these aristocratic parsons an' all' (302). He claims spousal proprietorship of the philanthropic trust, which he chooses to regard as immoral earnings:

The wave that had so long held back descended on Tom's brain [...] she had confessed her guilt by refusing to give up the wage of sin [...] 'Give it up, you slut!' said Tom. [...] Badalia's head drooped to the floor, and Tom kicked at that till the crisp tingle of hair striking through his nailed boot with the chill of cold water, warned him that it might be as well to desist. / 'Where's the curick's money, you kep' woman?' he whispered in the blood-stained ear (301).

Through this murder, Badalia's (sudden and unconvincing) passivity authorizes an irresponsible, lawless and abusive male culture. Whatever Kipling may have seen in 'brotheldom,' the narrator spares the reader any graphic an alienating image of his regenerate heroine fighting back against her murderer. Indeed, subsequently the standard stigmata of spousal abuse are identified by the expert onlooker Brother Victor: 'Yes, there's a domesticity about these injuries that shows their origin.' (305).

The themes of spousal abuse, of moral and organic damage both sustained, and generated, by the female slum body, dominate the decline-plot of slum femininity. The texts written subsequently by Arthur Morrison and W. Somerset Maugham foreground, like Gissing's *The Nether World*, the heterotopia and the dreamscapes of the modern city. But, like Kipling, they each effectively subject their heroine to a prostitute's death.

Chapter Eight

‘AN EAR FOR THE PROPER SPLENDOUR’:

ARTHUR MORRISON’S ‘LIZERUNT’,

AND W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM’S *LIZA OF LAMBETH*

The rise of Arthur Morrison from a working-class background in East London (a background which he deliberately obscured) to sub-editor of *The Palace Journal* and affluent writer of fiction and journalism, has been well-rehearsed by critics.¹ He found his first major success with a collection of bleak slum stories, which appeared in the *National Observer* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* between 1892 and 1894. These stories, with some additions, were subsequently published as the collection *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894). In the main, these stories represent a vast, monotonous and culturally-bereft East End. Unlike the version of East London produced by Walter Besant, however, there is nothing pleasant waiting to be discovered under the surface of Morrison’s city.

Morrison made claims of sociological truth for his slum fictions, and they were controversial, exciting high praise in some quarters, but strong criticism in others, variously in terms of their degree of realism and aesthetic merit.² Morrison’s public assertions that a degenerate ‘race’ of working-class people, distinguishable from the

¹ Stan Newens, *Arthur Morrison: The Novelist of Realism in East London and Essex* (Loughton: Alderton, 2008), pp. 16-23. All references to the text of ‘Lizerunt’ refer to that of the 1983 edition of *Tales of Mean Streets* already cited, and page numbers will appear in parentheses in the main body of the text.

² For major attacks on Morrison’s *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) and *A Child of the Jago* (1896), see respectively Harry Quilter, ‘The Gospel of Intensity’, *Contemporary Review* 67 (1895), 761-782; and Henry Duff Traill, ‘The New Realism’, *The Fortnightly Review* 61, n.s (1897), 63-73. For Morrison’s response, see his ‘What Is A Realist?’, *New Review*, 16 (1897), 326-336.

respectable poor, should be isolated in penal settlements, date from 1896.³ *Tales of Mean Streets* was overall less sensational, and less obviously indebted to evolutionary discourses, than his subsequent novel *A Child of the Jago* (1896).

‘Lizerunt’ is by far the most violent of the tales featured in *the Mean Streets* collection. It is the focus of interest here because it is a narrative of declining femininity which, like Gissing’s *The Nether World* and Kipling’s ‘Badalia Herodsfoot’, is fixated on the working-class female body and on what it represents as that body’s grotesque productions. As I argue, in common with other fin-de-siècle slum narratives, ‘Lizerunt’ traces an overt dynamic of sexual exchange, commodification and dissolution. Seduction by urban spectacles merges with sexual ruin and bodily infection. The story moves its eponymous heroine’s status from that of independent observing presence to that of prostitute, wretched embodiment of objectivity. The motif of Woman as commodified body is not only invoked in the narrative’s understanding of the commercial-sexual exchange present in popular leisure practices, but structures its grim trajectory, from transitory fairground of youth to the ‘windy street’ of toil-worn prostitution. Here again, the notion of ‘recapitulation’ is applied loosely within artistic structure, as the broad interpretive analogies to which ‘inferior’ bodies were subject help to shape the narrative of ‘Lizerunt.’

Desperation to attract a man has rightly been identified as a typical and perilous characteristic of the ‘factory girl’ in many representations of the period.⁴ In ‘Lizerunt’, this preoccupation with getting ‘a bloke’ is elaborated through the knitting of

³ Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press 1982 (1896)), p. 32. See also Arthur Morrison, ‘The Children of the Jago’, *Daily News*, 12 December 1896; Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1870-1945* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1994), p.112; Trotter *The English Novel*, p. 117. See also disturbing proposals for the incarceration and curtailing of the ‘propagation’ of the unfit poor in A. Osborn Jay, *The Social Problem: Its Possible Solution* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1893), pp. 92-103.

⁴ Francis, p. 63.

commodity fetishism to sexual seduction and bodily and moral corruption. These elaborations, as in so many of the texts examined in the course of this thesis, are expressed through participation in commercial leisure activities, and through interaction with the display window. In the course of relentless processes of interchangeability and equivalence, however, the shop window is the site at which the workgirl literally sells herself.

The initial description of Lizer indicates her social class – she is a factory worker – while emphasizing her youth, health and cleanliness: she is red-cheeked, with large white teeth; her fringe is glossy and her face ‘new-washed’ (29). As the story opens she is being courted by two rivals, the industrious Sam Cardew who flirts with Lizer by throwing orange peel at her while ‘prancing on the pavement,’ and the ‘slouching’ Billy Chope, a repellent facsimile of Tom Herodsfoot, who extorts money from his widowed mother, and who commences to express an interest in Lizer by assaulting her one evening on the Commercial Road (29-30). The theme of hooliganism continues as, describing Lizer’s trip with Billy to the Whit Monday Fair at Wanstead Flats, the narrator mobilizes well-established images of the Bank Holiday as festival of deviancy - not least the fear that ‘louts’ will set fire to the grass (31).⁵ The fair - an entertainment long associated by reformers with social chaos and prostitution - is a site of gender, and possibly class, intersection. Here, the multiplication of the crowd blazes forth the rich colours of mass-produced fashion.⁶ This thesis argues that fin-de-siècle slum writers depicted the expanding commodity culture in poor parts of London, carried as finery on the mobile bodies of young working women, as brightly

⁵ Bailey *Leisure and Class*, pp. 104-105,

⁶ Bartley, pp. 55-6. For the aggressive reform of Whitsun, a traditional holiday, in rural areas during the nineteenth-century, see Alun Howkins, ‘The Taming of Whitsun: The Changing Face of A Nineteenth-Century Rural Holiday’ in *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590-1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, ed. by Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo (Brighton and New Jersey: Harvester Press and Humanities Press, 1981), pp.187-208.

and poisonously seductive. In Morrison's tale, the fair is as much a site of imaginative looking and identity-construction as the commercial windows of the West End, and in Lizer the reader is presented with an unschooled subjectivity, though one confident in its desires. Her enjoyment of the fair is impaired by her lack of an impressive-enough hat – hats central to the fin-de-siècle visual text of the factory girl. She feels 'bitter envy of the feathers about her', typically 'pink or scarlet or what not' (31). The moving phantasmagoria of novelties to which Lizerunt responds, featuring hats 'of a wild blue or wilder green', suggests the fairy lights and flares, the illuminations of the booth and the barrow. Terry Eagleton's unfolding of the relationship between fashion and death in the work of Walter Benjamin can help us to think through Lizer's response to the fair's attractions and the now-familiar way that, in Morrison's fiction, commercial spectacle masks visions of bodily horror:

The commodity is a death's head that [...] has ceased to know itself as such. In the presence of fashion, that supreme cult of the commodity, we are in the presence of death – of a hectic repetition that gets precisely nowhere, a flashing of mirror upon mirror that believes that by thus arresting history it can avoid death, but in this orgy of matter succeeds only in being drawn more inexorably into its grasp.⁷

Having effectively exchanged Sam Cardew for Billy Chope because 'one must prefer the bird in the hand', Lizer finds herself short-changed. A half-drunk Billy realizes too late that 'some degree of plush was condign to the occasion and to his own expenditure' and a 'customary exchange of hats' between the couple does not take place (31-32). Lizer's desire is roused at the switching station between woman and commodity, between organic body and synthetic icon of plush; the narrator declares that Lizerunt would 'joyfully have given an ear for the proper splendour' (31). In this brutal image we see drawn together the story's tangle of anxious tropes and exchanges - its associations between the desired hat, the desire 'bloke', and Lizer's giving of

⁷ Terry Eagleton *Walter Benjamin: or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London, NLB, 1981), pp. 34-5.

herself to one in exchange for the other. It underscores the morbid penetrative effect of commodity culture on the female body, collapsing the purchase of pleasure into the selling of self. Chillingly, it recalls the dying Badalia's bloodied ear, into which Tom Herodsfoot whispered accusations of prostitution and demands for money. And, in this vein, it ties up with those associations between the veil, the genitals, physical inundation and the death's head, which haunt the narratives of the impoverished female body investigated in this thesis.

In her study of the grotesque imagery of the period, Ewa Kuryluk refers to the longstanding cultural affiliations between the covering of a girl's head and the bloody tearing of flesh during defloration in terms of 'traumatic exchange [in which] the hymen is given away for blood and semen'. She further notes that this penetration from without is paralleled in the emergence of the infant's head from within during childbirth.⁸ Further into its narrative of decline, 'Lizerunt' will, in a shocking image, produce a suggestive conjunction of sexual exchange, violence, and the death's head.

Meanwhile, when Billy's flirtation takes the form of releasing a foul-smelling 'squirt' of fluid from a 'lady's tormentor', Lizerunt runs alone with 'piercing shrieks' through the crowd, from which Sam Cardew, her more respectable suitor, emerges. A fight ensues between the drunken Billy and his rival. Standing on the edge of a 'hilarious' ring of spectators in the 'public gaze' of the Flats, Lizer gloats delightedly. The narrator underscores the transience of her joy and desirability: 'For almost five minutes she was Helen of Troy' (32). The fight costs Billy some blood and teeth, so Lizer trades him in for Sam, whom she appraises in terms of his potential to supply the desired commodity. They enjoy the fragmented elation of a Bank Holiday among the

⁸ Kuryluk, pp. 228-229.

city's amusements, disappearing at last into an ambiguous darkness: 'Billy was all very well; but Sam was better. She resolved to draw him for a feathered hat before next bank holiday [...] The rest was tram-car, Bow Music Hall, half-pints, and darkness' (33).

Billy's vengeance, in which a gang of 'Causeway chaps' beat Sam Cardew with sticks and belts, confines Sam to bed and bandages for some weeks. Exhibiting a troubling modern femininity bent on self-gratification and immune to concepts of self-sacrifice, Lizer quickly grows 'tired of bandages' (34). The heterotopic slice of time comprising the next bank holiday now becomes a reserve of her covetous imaginings, a landscape of pleasurable consumption associated with the novelty of the desired hat.⁹ Her great fear now is that 'a plush hat was further away than ever' (34). Thus - despite having been subjected to a second, more humiliating, public assault by Billy - Lizer proceeds to sell herself to him at the site of cosmetic spectacle, a display window.

In *Imaginations of Class*, Dan Bivona and Roger B Henkle suggest that in its 'rhetorical rhythms', Morrison's *Tales of Mean Streets* is similar to 'the uninflected, neutral style of Margaret Harkness's *A City Girl*'.¹⁰ Certainly in 'Lizerunt' we have a text which, like *A City Girl*, codes commodity desire as sexual seduction, dazzling its impoverished heroine with bright feathers and red plush (here the crimson plush of the hat rather than the bordelloesque decoration of a theatre box). However, while *A City Girl* casts aesthetic and sexual seduction as the very substance of exploitative class relations, 'Lizerunt' locates social menace in the impoverished body at the display-window. Whereas *A City Girl* writes the covetous gaze of the bourgeois exploiter as instrumental in class oppression, 'Lizerunt' figures the working-class male's touch –

⁹ See Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 27.

¹⁰ Bivona and Henkle, p. 109.

medium of unclean connection between impoverished bodies – as a primary source of urban threat. That touch, heralding the act of consumption, transforms Lizer metaphorically (and later, literally) into product and seller in one:

There was a milliner's window, with a show of nothing but fashionable plush-and-feather hats, and Lizerunt was lingering hereabouts one evening; when someone took her by the waist, and someone said, 'Which d'ye like, Lizer? The yuller un?'/Lizerunt turned and saw that it was Billy[...]/[...] [P]resently, convinced that bashing wasn't in it, she approached less guardedly; and she went away with a paper bag and the reddest of all the plushes and the bluest of all the feathers; a hat that challenged all the Flats the next bank holiday, a hat for which no girl need have hesitated to sell her soul (34-35).

Thus Lizer sells herself body and soul for synthetic pleasure. Subsequent to this scene, that seduced and bartered body will be implicated in the circulation of urban disease, positioned both in the time of individual organic decay, and in the evolutionary time of biogenetic law and social medicine. And central to Lizer's degeneracy is the image of the death's head.

SKULL IN EMBRYO: LIZER AS MOTHER AND PROSTITUTE

At the moment of her marriage, Lizer is located by the narrator in a generational chain of urban blight: she is, like Pennyloaf and Lascar Loo, the child of a drunken mother, a mother given to public affray. Mrs Hunt remains unseen, imprisoned on a charge of drunk and disorderly conduct, as Lizer, a little short of her eighteenth birthday, enjoys her intoxicated wedding celebrations. Meanwhile Billy's mother, whose fits of physical helplessness the story will ascribe not to the rigours of sweated labour but to alcoholism cunningly concealed, drinks gin and weeps 'dismally over her boy' in indulgence of male violence and fecklessness (35-6). Following this marriage, the narrative presents Billy's metropolitan mobility within a context of political unrest – a

context wholly absent from Kipling's 'Badalia Herodsfoot'. Nonetheless, the social analysis offered by 'Lizerunt' proves similar to that provided by Kipling. As Gill Davies writes of Morrison's slum fiction:

Commentators have taken Morrison's own word for his motivation in writing these stories, and have ignored the element of political and ideological hostility that runs through them. The East End that Morrison would like to 'celebrate' is one whose people 'did not make any fuss' about poverty and 'took no part in procession of the unemployed, and refused to go to charitable organisations. But other [radical and socialist] voices continually surface, to be dismissed by parody, sentimentality, or overt political criticism.¹¹

'Lizerunt' carefully documents one urban adventure, during the course of which Billy Chope variously attends 'a meeting of the Unemployed' and applauds 'a proposal to storm the Tower of London', but proves too cowardly to follow a procession 'led by a man with a handkerchief on a stick' (38). (This may be a mocking reference to the episode of 1886 in which John Burns, holding aloft a red flag, led a crowd from Trafalgar Square and along Pall Mall on behalf of the Social Democratic Federation, having declared that to hang the fattened capitalists in the House of Commons would be 'to waste good rope.' The journey along Pall Mall resulted in an infamous riot.)¹² Thereafter, Chope loiters in a public house in hopes of being treated to beer as an 'out-o'-worker' by sailors from St Katherine's dock (38-9). Such peregrinations, and Billy's rent, are subsidized by the labouring and intimidated forms of his mother, who mangles, and Lizer, who works in a pickle factory, and who then, as her mobility is diminished, undertakes odd jobs and charring (41). Indeed, the narrator asserts that 'Billy's rent was a simple fiction, devised on the suggestion of a

¹¹ Davies, p. 73. Pamela Fox suggests however that while Davies is correct to identify Morrison's hostility towards many of his working-class characters, such hostility is derived not from 'simple snobbishness' but from 'a more complex, desiring shame': Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1870-1945* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), pp.117-118.

¹² John Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain Since 1884* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990), p. 17.

smart canvasser, to give him the parliamentary vote that made him one of the People' (44).

José Harris suggests that the opening out of the franchise to slum tenants from the 1870s through compounding was troubling to many privileged observers because it was not perceived as being accompanied by any extension of the 'moral ethos of independent citizenship'.¹³ Further, in Billy Chope's lack of relish for confrontation with the police, the text may evidence a widespread 'fear of new voters as much as of violent demonstration' in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ 'Lizerunt', as a text of the 1890s, may be read as expressing a concern with cultural, rather than civil, disorder. For even in this story, the most lurid by far of those collected in *Tales of Mean Streets*, the violence is strictly personal and private. So far as the authorities are concerned, Billy Chope is indeed 'a disgrace but not a danger': he presents a hazard only to his wife and family.¹⁵

Again, the contrasts with the work of Margaret Harkness are instructive. Harkness's novel *Out of Work* (1888) addresses the issues of seasonal labour and unemployment in the decayed London labour market.¹⁶ Recounting the physical and moral deterioration of a hitherto respectable, but now unemployed, carpenter, Harkness undercuts complacent distinctions between respectable and unrespectable, skilled and unskilled, workers, positioning politically united crowds of 'working-men, loafers and corner men' on the streets of the capital. While the novel unfolds scenes of bleak, often harrowing social and political repression, the socialist voices present in the text are wholly rational; these include a skilled working man who addresses a crowd to

¹³ Harris 'Between Civic Virtue', pp.74- 77.

¹⁴ Ibid., 77.

¹⁵ *Life and Labour* ed. by Charles Booth and others, I, pp., 38-9.

¹⁶ See Law [Harkness] *Out of Work*.

criticize the press for categorizing the unemployed as ‘rough and idle chaps.’¹⁷

Contrastingly, Morrison’s text responds, distinctly and unsympathetically, to an emerging concept of ‘unemployment.’ Joblessness is presented as leisure.¹⁸ Chope, loafing and cadging shamelessly in the same dock areas of London in which so much of Harkness’s *Out of Work* is set, enjoys the political rally as spectacle, and concludes his afternoon with a perusal of the music-hall programme (39).

The contemporary biologizing of economic parasitism is not in evidence as Billy’s adventures are recounted.¹⁹ Yet the iconography of degeneracy is at work, and at its most threatening, in this text, revealing the horror of the slum body penetrated by urban artificialities, and by the flesh of the feckless slum male. For with Billy’s return from his excursion, the site of social instability shifts from the public street to the body of the slum female, as horror issues from that body’s secreting depths. Billy finds that Lizer, whose surfaces will never more glow with youth, never more be adorned with Bank Holiday feathers, has generated a monster, a spectacle of sin, reversion and contagion: ‘Something was moving feebly under a flannel petticoat. Billy pulled the petticoat aside [...] It was a blind, hairless homunculus, short of a foot long, with a skinny face set in a great skull’ (39).

This grotesque infant, so recently issued from Lizer’s womb, is open to broad cultural and recapitulatory associations, bringing the heroine’s body into engagement with an elite vogue for occultism, and with evolutionary structures of thought. Susan

¹⁷ Charles More, *Skill and the English Working Classes 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1980). For Harkness and the issue of organic predisposition to decline, see Ledger *The New Woman*, p. 49; Swafford, pp. 45- 57.

¹⁸ Jose Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy, 1886-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), pp. 48; 95-6. See also Beatrice Webb, ‘The Dock Life of East London’, *Nineteenth Century* 1887, 128 (1887), 483-499; O’Day and Englander, pp. 57-65.

¹⁹ Francis Galton, *Essays in Eugenics* (London: The Eugenics Society, 1909), p. 36; Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Development* (London: Dent, 1883), p. 304. See also Edwin Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan 1880).

Navarette's detailed discussion of Walter de la Mare's 'A.B.O.', referred to earlier, is instructive: de la Mare's trope may stand interchangeably for the embryo, for ancestral reversion, or for the excremental, man-made figure of the 'homunculus' – a term which may refer to the creation of artificial life from excrement or sperm within alchemy, as well as to pre-Victorian embryological theories.²⁰

Reference to the work of Aubrey Beardsley, infamous fin-de-siècle illustrator of the decadent, also assists in contextualizing the infant figure that Morrison fashions. In his formulations of the grotesque, Beardsley was strongly influenced by the Japanese art so central to Morrison's private financial-aesthetic concerns.²¹ As a number of critics note, the miniature figures drawn by Beardsley frequently combine the embryo or baby with the death's head or skeleton, and with the dwarf. Drawing together the historical and contemporary, the quasi-scientific and the esoteric, these unsettling images owe something to biogenetic discourses and diagrams, as well as referring to the alchemical homunculus or embryo.²²

One cultural historian, emphasizing the ambiguity of a number of Beardsley's illustrations where childbirth or abortion may be represented, notes the symbolic

²⁰ Navarette, pp. 62- 65.

²¹ Linda Gertner Zatlin, Beardsley's 'Japanese' Grotesques', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25 (1997), 87-108; also helpful are: Ian Fletcher, 'A Grammar of Monsters: Beardsley's Images and their Sources', *English Literature in Transition* 30 (1987), 141-63; Jennifer Higgins, 'Unfamiliar Places: France and the Grotesque in Aubrey Beardsley's Poetry and Prose', *The Modern Language Review* 106 (2011), 63-85. For the collection of East Asian art by Europeans during this period, see Max Put, *Plunder and Pleasure: Japanese Art in the West, 1860-1930* (Leiden: Hotei Publishing, 2000).

²² Chambers Haldane Cooke MacFall *Aubrey Beardsley: the Man and His Work* (London: John Lane, Bodley Head, 1928), pp. 9-11; Malcolm Easton, *Aubrey Beardsley and the Dying Lady* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), pp. 180-182; Menon; Kuryluk, p. 107; Navarette, pp. 67; 81-2. Enriching context is provided by Mark S. Morrison, 'The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 31:2 (2008), 1-22; Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004).

equation of the embryo with the baby in his work.²³ Another, Milly Heyd, insistently deciphers Beardsley's imagery in terms of the tubercular artist's struggle to understand himself; yet, she too makes a number of observations helpful to this discussion. She distinguishes the dwarfs appearing in his work from the embryos. The dwarfs, she suggests, may be read as being miscarried, aborted or deformed creatures, merging adult and infant characteristics, and linked to tropes of sexually aggressive femininity and decapitation.²⁴ The embryo, meanwhile, refers, like the abortion, to 'the absence of final shaping' but it also signals rapid development, precocious flowering in conjunction with immaturity. This symbol can be referred back to scientific discourses around the precocity and arrested development of the female body, and thus to Lizer's prematurely married, but rapidly decaying, form.²⁵

Thus, consideration of the evasion of strict categorization, the mingling of the occult and the scientific, to be found in the work of de la Mare and Beardsley, can suggest fresh ways to think about the grotesque forms of physicality which Morrison's story presents. Like the dark motifs produced by writers and artists of decadence, Morrison's homunculus, with its large skull and its blindness, alludes to the esoteric, to the artificial, and to the unstable organic. It is informed by pseudo-scientific paradigms in which 'the so-called lower races, women, the sexually deviate, the criminal, the urban poor, and the insane were [...] considered as biological 'races apart''.²⁶ It is closely allied to the alarming representations of slum femininity to which this thesis

²³ Linda Gertner Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990), pp. 111-113.

²⁴ Milly Heyd, *Aubrey Beardsley: Symbol, Mask and Self-Irony* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 69-82. In discussing the dwarf figure in terms of abortion, Heyd draws upon Beardsley's correspondence, as well as definitions of the word 'dwarf' current in the Oxford Dictionary of 1882-8; see *ibid*, pp. 69-70.

²⁵ Patricia Murphy, *In Science's Shadow: Literary Constructions of Late-Victorian Womanhood* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2006), p. 26.

²⁶ Stepan, 'Race and Gender', pp. 39-40.

attends. For all of these figures articulate a range of anxieties around popular cultures, urban poverty, and sexuality, by reference to the devolutionary and the mythic.

Lizer's grotesque baby may be read in relation to the city-dwelling 'pygmy' described by William Booth, founder and the first General of the Salvation Army. As is well known, Booth adopted elements of Henry Morton Stanley's famous account of his adventures abroad, *In Darkest Africa* (1890), to develop the longstanding analogy between impoverished city-dwellers and 'savages'. Booth's sensational text *In Darkest England* (October 1890) depicts a London which 'breed(s) its own pygmies' and 'similar horrors' amid 'monotonous darkness' close by the topography of imperial power.²⁷ 'Homunculus' and 'manikin' (a term used by Stanley and others in reference to pygmy peoples) translate from Latin and Dutch respectively as 'little man.' Although the cultural freight and applications of these terms differ, the homunculus and the pygmy can be linked through their relations to both the magical and the scientific.²⁸ This relationship is formed not only through the decadent imaginings of such cultural producers as Beardsley and de la Mare, but through Victorian anthropology itself.

S.P. Verner might lament that 'the layman can no longer tell the difference between a dwarf and a pygmy', but the commentators who confidently constructed similarities and kinships between various peoples of Central Africa, cast as 'mannikins [... in a] primitive and aboriginal state', with 'Dwarfs [...] Trolls [...and] Irish Leprechauns' were employing processes of analogy similar to those found in

²⁷ Booth, *In Darkest England*, pp. 11-12. For context see *Into Unknown England, 1866-1913: Selections from the Social Explorers*, ed. by Peter Keating (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976); John Birerman, *Dark Safari: The Life Behind the Legend of Henry Morton Stanley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991).

²⁸ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 37-130.

contemporary scientific analysis.²⁹ Scholars such as Colin Turnbull and Chris Ballard have charted Western understandings of pygmy peoples over thousands of years, from the depictions of Homer onwards. Explorers and commentators across centuries have affiliated pygmies with apes and dwarves, satyrs, giants and sphinxes.³⁰ Indeed, Ballard has explored the ways in which European knowledge of pygmies at the fin de siècle and beyond,

depended almost entirely upon the evidence of fleeting encounters reported by explorers, missionaries and colonial administrators [... and] might fairly be regarded as an extension of the mythological frame for Pygmies developed over previous millennia. [..... Even Victorian anthropologists] assumed more than a passing resemblance among short-statured people not just within Central Africa but also across the world.³¹

The dwarf-embryo-homunculi of the decadent imaginary drew upon the intersecting images of myth and popular science to express cultural anguish. Central to that anguish was fear that the ‘primitive’, the devolutionary, lay beneath the apparently healthy organic exterior – that barbarism dwelt in the modern city’s foul depths. Widely-circulating esoteric and evolutionary notions centred alike on processes of analogy, on occult mechanisms, on mutation. In the homunculus, Morrison presents a fearful and suggestive grotesque – the bursting forth of the primordial in urban London - which merges the devolutionary and the fantastic.

Clearly, the significance of the diverse diseased children identifiable in the pages of fin-de-siècle fiction can be extended beyond the cultural obsession with syphilis highlighted by Elaine Showalter.³² Morrison’s homunculus signals the emergence of occulted, embryological horror: born prematurely, after Billy gives Lizer

²⁹ S.P. Verner, ‘The African Pygmy’, *Popular Science* 69 (1906), 471-477 (p. 473); Guy Burrows, *The Land of the Pigmyes* (London: Pearson, 1898), pp.173-4.

³⁰ Colin M. Turnbull ‘The Mbuti Pygmies: an Ethnographic Survey’, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 50 (1965), 139-282; Chris Ballard, ‘Strange Alliance: Pygmies in the Colonial Imaginary’ *World Archaeology* 38 (2006), 133-151.

³¹ Ballard, pp. 135-141.

³² Showalter, ‘Syphilis, Sexuality’.

a kick which 'laid her low on the stairs', before trying to 'kick again in a more telling spot' (38) it is a close relative of the 'abortions' which breathe the air of Gissing's Clerkenwell, and of the scrofulous, scum-like babies tended by Badalia Herodsfoot in Kipling's 'brotheldom.' Like Gissing, Morrison deals in monstrosity, and renders the 'real' world – a literary vision of the late-Victorian East End - though images of distortion.

At the same time, an acknowledgement of the 'hover[ing]' of concerns about syphilis at the 'Gothic margins' of some realist fiction can only enrich our understanding of both the feminine marital slum body and gruesome child which 'Lizerunt' depicts.³³ As Lucy Bland reminds us, the disease 'indexed all the contemporary fears of national deterioration, degeneration and 'race suicide'', representing 'a lurking, undefined threat to stability, the family, the British race, the Empire.' And it was habitually traced to the body of the prostitute, and her licentious male client.³⁴ Lizer - metaphorically or otherwise - has been infected by the intimate touch of the slum male, a destructive touch bound up with an initial experience of glaring city pleasures. Sanders L. Gilman's discussion of the production, from the eighteenth century onwards, of the image of the 'individual bearing the sign and stigmata of syphilis' as 'that of the corrupt female' is pertinent here as it is to representations of the decapitating feminine, or of the actress whose looks have been ruined by acid.³⁵ Lizer, who sold herself to Billy because her desiring gaze was excited by the display of gaudy plush hats, is positioned as prostitute-in-waiting. If the liability to devolution is present in all things, the child's form prefigures what is as yet concealed. The child's wasted face and the emphasis on its skull, symbol of death,

³³ Ibid, p.106.

³⁴ Bland, pp. 243-4.

³⁵ Gilman, *Disease*, p. 252.

conjoins the beginning of life with its end; the child both embodies, and prefigures, disease.

Thus, a ‘narrow’ reading of the child’s body in relation to syphilis opens back onto a more general anxiety: nature appearing as a ‘vast *memento mori*’ in the wake of evolutionary and anthropological sciences’ revelations that, ‘all that seemed benign or beautiful merely masked –was in reality symptomatic and premonitory of – extensive processes of decay.’³⁶ The child’s deathly body is linked, culturally, metaphorically, to the range of grotesque bodies – veiled, oozing or castrating - discussed in this thesis. Milly Heyd, reading the embryos drawn by Aubrey Beardsley as symbols of his life, sums up this broader aesthetic of health and dissolution, beauty and death: ‘[The artist] juxtaposes the pre-human stage of life, the embryo, and the skeleton. [because] death is embedded in the body from the moment of its conception, even before it is possible to regard it as fully alive.’³⁷

There is a further sense in which Morrison’s motif connects to broader scenes of feminine horror – of woman as morbid consumer and as commodity. The image of the child’s head, so recently emerged, unites those associations identified by Ewa Kuryluk between the maiden’s cap, sexual penetration and the appearance of the child’s head, and it responds to Lizer’s Bank Holiday fantasy of bloody exchange - of defloration in return for the sterile mass article (‘Lizerunt [...] would joyfully have given an ear for the proper splendour’ (31)). Again, Morrison is producing imagery variously connected to fin-de-siècle notions of Woman as decapitator.³⁸ With the emergence of the blighted child, the ruinous implications of Lizer’s selling her soul at

³⁶ Navarette, p. 31.

³⁷ Heyd, p. 58.

³⁸ See Kuryluk, pp. 227-237.

the display window emerge also. As Lizer's body gapes, the death's head emerges from beneath her once-attractive surfaces.

In this representation, the organic and social corruption is so absolute, that the idea of healing through a Walter Besant-esque counter-contagion of virtue appears absurd. Roger B. Henkle has discussed the ways in which the slum heroines of late-Victorian slum fiction fail to function as feminine 'register of morality', in a context of perceived working-class misogyny and intractability to programmes of reform.³⁹ Far from functioning as conduit of domestic virtue, Lizer's body, once 'susceptible of a high polish,' is established as sexualized conduit of all that is unclean and morbid. As the slum closes over Lizer, troubling fecundity replaces youthful clarity. While Billy's mother achieves apparent cleanliness and clarity only in death – the profile of her face 'sharp and meagre against the black grate', her skin 'white, and look[ing] cleaner than its wont' (45) – the confines of Lizer's body become ever less distinct:

The red of her cheeks, once bounded only by the eyes and the mouth, had shrunk to a spot in the depth of each hollow; gaps had been driven in her big white teeth; even the snub of her nose had run to a point, and the fringe hung dry and ragged, while the bodily outline was a sack's. At home, the children lay in her arms or tumbled at her heels, puling and foul. Whenever she was near it, there was the mangle to be turned [...] (41-2).

This limited spatial matrix is a prelude to a renewed, and more troubling, mobility. Like Pennyloaf and Badalia, Lizer is linked to discourses of male vice and violence. As Lizer's body decays, the spectre of prostitution which haunts so many texts of slum femininity is reified. Billy's brutal command to Lizer to prostitute herself, given as she kneels 'at the child's floor-bed', recalls her earlier association with sexual autonomy and with the mass article – an association underscored by Billy's suggestion of Sam Cardew as a potential client (47). Lizer is now reduced to

³⁹ Bivona and Henkle, pp. 109-116.

the most conspicuous example of the sexual commodification which so absorbed Victorian commentators. Her body, having borne one multivalent embodiment of social, sexual and cultural disorder (the skull-faced homunculus), becomes another – the streetwalker, a figure ‘written into [late-] Victorian narratives as the epitome of prostitution’.⁴⁰

In a sense, Lizer is the quintessence of misery and disease before she even reaches the street. A less-than-respectable working-class marriage has drawn her medical and moral ‘rottenness’ to the surface: the decline-plot of the factory girl not only parallels, but coincides with, the downward trajectory of the prostitute. Gap-toothed, dried-out and lacking cosmetic disguise, Lizer’s body both registers and generates urban sexual danger. As Nina Attwood has argued, although representations of the rapid decline of the prostitute were potent and dominant throughout the middle and latter decades of the nineteenth century, they were constantly challenged and reworked across a range of discourses, medical, feminist and literary.⁴¹ ‘Lizerunt,’ however, offers a version of the myth of the prostitute’s decline. Morrison ruthlessly reduces Lizer to a sign: it is unnecessary for him to continue his narrative beyond the point of Lizer’s ejection into the street.⁴²

⁴⁰ Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.124.

⁴¹ See Attwood.

⁴² Here I draw upon. Buck-Morss, ‘The Flâneur’, p. 122.

FEATHERS AND FLESH:

DANCING AND SQUATTING IN MAUGHAM'S LAMBETH

The concept and accusation of prostitution is central to the fate of W. Somerset Maugham's eponymous heroine, Liza Kemp. *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), written following Maugham's spell undertaking student obstetric work in South London, reproduces the familiar journey of decline from a transient youth swathed in mass fashions to the emergence of a corrupt physiological interior.⁴³ Here, however, the nubile heroine is undone, not by marriage, but by an affair with a married man and – notwithstanding the centrality of a Bank Holiday excursion to the plot – this effects a dispersal of 'a time of love and joy' constituting the affair across a range of modern city spaces.⁴⁴ Indeed in *Liza*, the fin-de-siècle Bank Holiday, that most intriguing phenomenon of cyclical revelry, is described at great length, yet flattened out, drained of cultural richness or social connectivity, functioning not to delineate a working-class culture, as Maugham claimed, but to advance the novel's fixation with the dialectic of youthful vigour and matriarchal exhaustion. This discussion, however, is primarily concerned with two key scenes, in which that dialectic is most explicitly and meaningfully present. One is the opening scene which introduces the character of Liza as mobile carrier of the city's commercial cultures, and which marks her first physical encounter with the married man who will become her lover. The other scene is one of female-on-female assault occurring towards the close of the book. This episode results in Liza's rapid organic and moral deterioration, and the eruption in the text – as in

⁴³ A brief account written by Maugham more than thirty years later appears in his Preface to the 'Collected' edition: W. Somerset Maugham, *Liza of Lambeth* (London: William Heinemann, 1934): v-xi. All citations refer to this edition of the novel.

⁴⁴ Maugham *Liza* p. 102; references will hereafter appear in parentheses in the main body of the text.

Gissing's *The Nether World*, Kipling's 'Record of 'The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot' and Morrison's 'Lizerunt' - of the abortion, and of the grotesque body.

Gissing's *The Nether World*, published eight years previously, presents phases of feminine youth and dissolution within the great exhibitiv space of the Crystal Palace - site of spatial, temporal and cultural complexity, associated with industrial and evolutionary progress, in which bodies exhibited in cases 'rendered the whole world metonymically present'.⁴⁵ In Gissing's representation of the Bank Holiday celebrations, mature working women are represented as repellent nemesis of the young, delicate-looking women who parade there in massified finery, their bodies guided by the troubling touch of the working-class male. Gissing's narrator asks how it is that the middle-aged women have become 'animal, repulsive, absolutely vicious in ugliness'.⁴⁶ The paradigmatic opening scene of *Liza of Lambeth* takes place on Vere Street, a monotonous, cemented space where there is not 'a bow-window or even a projecting cornice or window-sill to break the straightness of the line from one end of the street to the other' (1). Like the exhibitiv space of the Crystal Palace, this symmetrical street displays and holds in tension modernity and regression.

In this slum landscape, interior and exterior are interwoven; doors, windows and domestic bodies are open. As married women discuss death and forthcoming birth (a local murder and 'the atrocity or merits of the local midwives'), their unrestrained forms swell with new life, and their 'squatting' bodies invoke both menstrual and excremental modes of bodily evacuation (3). This scene discloses that fertility, animality and pollution, repulsive to the narrator, are secreted within the female form. From its opening pages, the novel emphasizes that beauty and mobility are, for the

⁴⁵ Bennett, pp.77-96.

⁴⁶ Gissing *The Nether World*, p. 109.

women of Vere Street, ephemeral indeed: a bestial phase of ‘squatting’ and ‘nursing’ awaits: ‘The number of babies was prodigious; they sprawled about everywhere, on the pavement, round the doors, and about their mothers’ skirts [...] there were usually two women squatting on the doorstep [...] invariably nursing babies, and most of them showed clear signs that the present object of maternal care would soon be ousted by a new arrival’ (2).

If, as Lise Shapiro Sanders asserts, the shopgirl’s dress and demeanour render her a spectacle and ‘underscore the metaphoric and ideological links between female flânerie and prostitution,’ then Liza’s exuberant opening scene testifies to the coupling of popular inscriptions of a zestful, ‘public’ working-class femininity, and an unregulated and coarsening slum multiparity.⁴⁷ Like the as-yet-‘unregenerate’ Badalia dancing on a barrow in 1893, Liza, with her ‘enormous fringe, puffed out and curled and frizzed’, seems determined to make a spectacle of herself. ‘[E]nchanted’ by the ‘uproar’ which greets her appearance on Vere Street in modish finery, Liza is the streetwalking embodiment of massified artifice, of garish excess:

She was dressed in brilliant violet, with great lappets of velvet, and she had on her head an enormous black hat covered with feathers [...] Liza saw what a sensation she was creating; she arched her back and lifted her head, and walked down the street, swaying her body from side to side, and swaggering along as though the whole place belonged to her (5).

In contrast to Morrison’s flimsy heroine Lizerunt (fancying herself, however fleetingly, as Helen of Troy), Liza Kemp is styled, with hints of androgyny, as ‘conquering hero’ and as ‘empress’, exercising a ‘tyranny of Vere Street’ (6-8). This ‘swaggering’ form, decked in the glaring inorganic, assumes command of the organ-grinder’s programme. Giving herself ‘entirely to the present pleasure’, waltzing with her friend Sally, Lizer enacts a set of public femininities available, like velvet lappets,

⁴⁷ Sanders, pp.39-40.

for any woman to adopt in the fin-de-siècle metropolis (7-9). For the crowd's enjoyment Liza offers '[T]he languor of her eyes, the contemptuous curl of the lips [...] the exquisite turn of the hand' (8). When she announces that the ballet at Vere Street will rival those of the Canterbury and South London music halls, she is repaid by a dance which, the narrator assures us, the local girls 'could not have done... better in a trained ballet' (9).

Maugham's representation draws upon contemporary depictions of the London workgirl as one who does not fear, but plays with, what Gillian Rose has called women's 'intense self-awareness about being seen and about taking up space.'⁴⁸ Mary Russo's discussion of carnival's place in dominant cultures is pertinent here: she alludes to the relations between 'bold affirmation of feminine performance, imposture and masquerade', and 'silence, withdrawal and invisibility', as the social options available to women.⁴⁹ It is clear which Liza chooses. She declines to recognize public space as 'hazardous arena'.⁵⁰ Thus will her body, all too soon, be reduced to doughy indefiniteness, ejecting blood and death.

Liza's opening scene establishes her susceptibility to urban stimulants, which the novel unfailingly allies with sexual arousal. '[G]etting excited at the admiration of onlookers', Liza dances alone, lifting her skirts, exhibiting her brilliant lilac stockings, kicking off a male onlooker's hat and performing a Catherine-wheel (10). This sequence writes a transgressive working-class sexuality combining an ostentatious display of cheap industrial produce with the eager revelation of the sexual depths. This combination will lead ultimately to the 'squatting' which is taking place only a matter

⁴⁸ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 146.

⁴⁹ Russo, p. 55.

⁵⁰ Rose *Feminism*, p. 146.

of metres away. Thus, on Vere Street, does the commodified female form of spectacle meet the uncontained body of the slum. In 'taking up space' in this way, Liza is written as subject and as object, consumer and consumable, one who invites ribald male attention, and enjoys being pursued for a kiss by a group of local men. Liza is caught and kissed by Jim Blakeston, who is married, and with whom she will embark on a disastrous love affair (11).

The limits on the ways in which any woman, however extrovert, can inhabit city space, produces a moral dilemma for Liza Kemp. Less passive than Nelly Ambrose, more independent than Lizerunt, apparently scornful of romance for its own sake, Liza must either travel to Chingford with a man in whom she has no interest, or suffer exclusion. In consequence the site at which the holiday brake is loaded with a festive excess of consumables presents, as surely as Wanstead Flats or a window of plush hats, a site of desire and denial. Liza's response to this visual profusion is entangled with her response to Jim Blakeston's whispered blandishments: it is sexual temptation: '[S]he couldn't resist any longer.' In this context, her decision not to 'renounce her pleasure' just because 'she wasn't going to marry Tom' inevitably carries a sexual charge (37). Returning to her room, she eagerly assumes the garb which renders her both consumer and massified spectacle:

[T]earing off her old dress she slipped into her gorgeous violet one; she kicked off her old ragged shoes and put on her new boots. She brushed her hair down and rapidly gave her fringe a twirl and a twist [...] putting on her black hat with all the feathers, she rushed along the street, and scrambling up the brake streets fell panting on Tom's lap (39-40).

The real-world heterotopia, suggests Edward Soja, reveals the meaning of social being: 'It is this complex juxtaposition and cosmopolitan simultaneity of differences in space that charges the heterotopia with the social and cultural meaning

of collectivity.’⁵¹ Maugham’s Bank Holiday trip refuses any such complexity. In describing a refreshment break early in the outing, a mocking narrator falls back upon that old stand-by in describing the working classes, pastoral, in a section which Adrian Poole rightly criticizes as ‘hideously cheap’.⁵² That idyll, with its representation of corporeal ingestion – in its licking tongues, its purposeful mingling of saliva, its heroine’s focus on her own consuming throat and stomach, its male-female spitting contest – produces a familiar spectacle of promiscuity, of scandalous and contaminating connection: ‘They devoured the provisions like ravening beasts, stolidly, silently, earnestly, in large mouthfuls which they shoved down their throats unmasticated. [... T]hey stopped at last, and a long sigh of contentment broke from their two-and-thirty throats’ (48-49). Thus is the social body reduced to bovine corporeality.

The novel’s subsequent production of a degenerative interconnection of bodies is the focus of the closing section of this chapter. In the scene to which I now turn, it is a female form marked by atavism and gender instability, rather than Liza’s male lover, who inflicts upon the slum heroine’s body violence and destructive penetration. Through the details of a fight in Vere Street, Maugham effectively links together corporeal trauma, reproduction and the atavistic to present a form of recapitulation as violent urban process. In uncovering these complex associations, I once more treat the female slum body as focus for merged environmental onslaught and dark heredity: for the destructive forces of the synthetic modern and the repellent organic.

⁵¹ Soja, ‘Heterotopologies’, p. 15.

⁵² Poole, p. 59. The pastoral section, ‘The Idyll of Corydon and Phyllis’, occurs at Maugham *Liza*, pp. 45-47.

‘SHAPELESS SLUTTISHNESS’:

REVERSION AND ABORTION ON VERE STREET

As rumour of Liza’s affair circulates, Vere Street, which she once dominated through bold physical engagement, becomes a hostile environment. Her sense of space is transformed. Through the very sexuality from which she once derived a sense of power, she is reduced to object of licentious insult - a public spectacle now in ways she cannot control. The novel presents one encounter with a group of the street’s young men in painful detail: Liza is told that she is ‘overworkin’’ herself, enjoys ‘all the pleasures of a ‘usband an’ none of the trouble’, and that she should give all of Vere Street’s young men ‘a chanst’ or ‘a turn’ (109).

The men’s suggestion that Liza obtains sexual pleasure while improperly evading the ‘trouble’ presented by marriage is mistaken. The stages of subjection and decay contingent on marriage in Vere Street, are played out across Liza’s body. Her decision to keep her lover waiting in order to comfort her friend Sally, a battered wife, leads to the marking of Liza’s own body: an upset Jim drunkenly, and apparently mistakenly, strikes Liza’s face. When her black eye is noticed by fellow workers, Liza reproduces the lies told by the novel’s abused wives: ‘Well, I did fall against the chest of drawers yesterday’ (125). This explanation prompts mockery, and her peers’ facetious remarks echo Liza’s earlier, genuine, expressions of surprise at the drunken violence meted out to the matriarchs of Vere Street by seemingly mild-mannered men (120-6).⁵³

Warned that Mrs Blakeston means to do her violence, Liza ‘s response is outlined in terms of corporeality, of excretion. She breaks out in a ‘cold sweat’ and

⁵³ Compare to an incident described in Maugham’s *Liza* at pp. 69-73.

wonders what will happen if she is caught by the ‘strong and muscular’ adversary (127-8). Having till now given little thought to her lover’s wife save as a quaint and shadowy figure in outmoded clothes, Liza now wakes nightly ‘bathed in sweat’ having dreamt of ‘the big, powerful form, the heavy, frowning face, and the curiously braided brown hair’ (129). This dread produces a mode of confinement more absolute than that of Vere Street’s ever-pregnant wives: she seldom leaves her room. And when at last she encounters Mrs Blakeston in Vere Street, the older woman blocks Liza’s way, ‘preventing her from moving’ (130). Dominating the cemented, monotonous space of the city, Mrs Blakeston confronts the nubile young factory girl with a form every bit as ‘animal, repulsive and absolutely vicious in ugliness’, as the older women promenading in the repetitive exhibit space of the Crystal Palace.⁵⁴

In Maugham’s representation, the inhabitants of this street, who once found pleasure in Liza’s confident self-display, censure her for ‘interfering’ with another woman’s husband. Now, dressed not in massified lilac finery but in her everyday working clothes, Liza is subject to the most extreme sexual stigma: Mrs Blakeston tells her that she is a ‘dirty little bitch’ and a ‘prostitute’ (132). Thus a novel which lays claim to some form of sociological truth (‘I put down what I had seen and heard as plainly as possible’) points to the vexed question of the heterogeneity of definitions of the prostitute.⁵⁵ After all, ‘Any loveless or extramarital sexual activity could be deemed illicit, immoral, ‘fallen’ or as prostitution.’ If ‘the ‘prostitute’ was a label or censure, encompassing a constellation of women’s behaviour which moral reformers found objectionable and threatening’. Maugham’s narrative clarifies and answers that threat, as Emma Francis suggests, by yielding up Liza ‘on the altar of her sexuality.’⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Gissing *Nether World*, p. 109.

⁵⁵ Maugham ‘Preface’ in *Liza of Lambeth*, p. viii.

⁵⁶ Attwood, p. 14; Mahood, *The Magdalenes*: p. 68; Francis, p. 64.

A ring is formed, organized betting breaks out, and men are appointed as seconds. The novel now defines the working-class street as regular venue for all-female violence: spectators fondly recall a recent fight involving one ‘Old Mother Gregg.’ Meanwhile, ‘raining blows’ and receiving them, biting and being bitten, the material of Lizer’s body continues as locus of masculine speculation. At this point, however, the speculation concerns Liza’s capacity to withstand and mete out violence. She invites male sympathy on account of her ‘pluck’: from asking Liza to ‘give us all a chanst’, the Vere Street men suggest that ‘Liza’s got no chanst against a big woman like thet’ (135). By those women watching the fight, however, Liza is relentlessly eroticized. Her perceived sexual lawlessness consists not only in what she has done, but in her assumed possession of voracious appetites which render all husbands passive consumables on display: ‘Now she’s been carryin’ on with one, she’ll try an’ git others’ (135). Again, the residential street envisaged as site of bodily exhibition and the display of wares – here, as the thoroughfare of Liza’s boundless desire, the site of a feminine urban gaze conceived as powerful: as ‘covetous and erotic’.⁵⁷

This sequence illuminates an exchange, vital to the readings in this thesis, which developed during the late nineteenth century, and which is discussed by Gillian Swanson in depth: an exchange between ‘the meaning of prostitution, embodying working-class female urban femininity’, and that of ‘the middle-class female consumer’ - both figures being identified with pathology and disorder.⁵⁸ The humble space of Vere Street is imagined by its female inhabitants as a zone of sexual consumption and exchange, a space in which the respectable dwelling is vulnerable to infiltration by the streetwalker (‘She’d better not come round my ‘ouse; I’ll soon give

⁵⁷ Pollock, p. 67.

⁵⁸ Swanson, p. 82.

‘er wot for’ (135)). At the same time, with both her mobility and her face impaired, Liza’s disordered appearance underscores her leaky female corporeality: ‘Meanwhile Liza was standing at one corner of the ring, trembling all over and crying bitterly. One of her eyes was bunged up, and her hair, all dishevelled, was hanging down over her face’ (137).

The presence of ‘a little dark woman, who looked like a Jewess’ in the midst of all this sexually-charged violence is significant (135). Jewish women were perceived by late-Victorian and Edwardian social purists to be substantially implicated in metropolitan vice.⁵⁹ As Sander L. Gilman has discussed, the figure of the Jew has enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with that of the prostitute - most particularly, as pursuer of a libidinal relationship with money, and as carrier of syphilis.⁶⁰ Moreover, a careful analysis of the work of Cesare Lombroso undertaken by Nancy A. Harrowitz has disclosed an ‘intensity’ of connection in his writings between artifice, prostitution and Jewish femininity.⁶¹ Certainly, the sudden appearance of the figure of the ‘Jewess’ connects to the reversion and aberrant sexuality which surface in this scene of *Liza of Lambeth*.

All of which brings this reading to the figure of Mrs Blakeston, and therefore, to the vital function of the female-to-female brawl in this novels’ project of fixing the female body in biological and evolutionary time. Mrs Blakeston is muscular and radically androgynous, her ‘loud voice hoarse with rage’, her fists raised, her ‘heavy jaw protruding,’ her eyes ‘savagely glaring’ and her frowning brows ‘dark and stern’ (132-133). It is possible to locate in – or see inscribed upon – this body, something like

⁵⁹ Bartley, pp 117-8.

⁶⁰ Gilman, ‘I’m Down’; see also Lacqueur, pp. 339-40.

⁶¹ Nancy A. Harrowitz, *Antisemitism: Misogyny and the Logic of Cultural Difference: Cesare Lombroso and Matilde Serao* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 58.

atavism. Here the materialization of the ‘savage’ evolutionary past is made visible as gender instability – itself a manifestation of wide-ranging social and corporeal anxiety. Lombroso, after all, asserted that deviant women were more likely than ‘normal’ women to have heavy and protruding jaws and ‘over-jutting brows’.⁶² The extent to which Lombroso’s work on atavism was accepted in England is debatable, although the work of Lombroso and his fellow criminal anthropologists answered, both to anxieties specific to post-unification Italy, and to wider European concerns on the woman question.⁶³ Certainly, criminal anthropology, in common with other positivist scientific discourses circulating at this time, sanctioned and elaborated longstanding prejudices regarding race and gender difference.⁶⁴

Maugham was a medical student at the time he wrote *Liza of Lambeth*, and reviews and other discussions of the newly-available, heavily edited, translation of *The Female Offender* were circulating in medical and other publications; attention to the atavistic markings exhibited by Mrs Blakeston, clarifies what her body has in common with those of all the slum heroines discussed over the last two chapters of this thesis.⁶⁵ It clarifies, too, what she has in common with the abortions which emerge from within so many fictional slum bodies. For Mrs Blakeston is intelligible in relation to other

⁶² Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), pp. 27-8; 77. For the work of other anthropologists on ‘masculine’ traits among female offenders see Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (London: Praeger, 2002), pp. 69-70.

⁶³ As Gibson points out, the study of female delinquents arose simultaneously from a fear that Italian women were both ‘anachronistic symbols of Italy’s failure to transcend its pre-capitalist economy’ and were entering the industrial workforce or demanding ‘legal and political equality’. Gibson, pp.55-6.

⁶⁴ Greenslade *Degeneration*, pp. 90-100. For an excellent study of Italian criminal anthropology within the broader context of nineteenth-century scientific and social undertakings which located difference in the body, see George W. Stocking, Jr., ‘Bones, Bodies, and Behaviour’ in *Bones, Bodies and Behaviour: Essays on Biological Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

⁶⁵ *The Female Offender* was translated from, Cesare Lombroso and Auglielmo Ferrero, *La Donna Delinquente, la Prostituta e la Donna Normale* (Rome: Torino, 1893). The T. Fisher Unwin edition was considered deserving of an Introduction by William Douglas Morrison, Governor of Wandsworth Prison. For examples of contemporary reviews, see Charles L. Dana ‘Lombroso’s Female Offender’ in *Science*, n.s. 2., (1895), 164-5; ‘Review’, *Mind* n.s. 3 (1894), 147-152; Major Arthur Griffiths [H.M. Inspector of Prisons], ‘Female Criminals’, *The North American Review* 161 (1895), 141-152.

‘inferior’ evolutionary bodies.⁶⁶ As David G. Horn has discussed, although Lombroso’s theories owe much to new practices of physical measurement, he drew upon the same analogies which ‘enabled not only transfers of meanings among bodies and organisms (from the criminal to the child, from the child to the savage, from the savage to the animal) but also layerings of various kinds of time: embryological, developmental, historical and evolutionary.’⁶⁷ These are the analogies which informed multiple fields of degenerationist and recapitulatory discourse, and which powered Haeckel’s biogenetic formulations.

By the end of the fight, Liza and Mrs Blakeston circle one another, ‘scratching, tearing, biting, sweat and blood pouring down their faces, and their eyes fixed on one another, bloodshot and full of rage’ in an overcoming of physical boundaries (134-137). The fight is a violent connection between bodies and this connection brings on a radical decline in Liza, a kind of reversion. At the same time, Mrs Blakeston’s physique can also be read as a product of her environment: coarsened by slum life, her body marked ‘by hard work and much child-bearing’, Mrs Blakeston’s terrifying form figures as the material outcome of working-class marriage (41-2). As plastic a signifier as the slum abortion, both evolutionary and metaphorical, Mrs Blakeston manifests Liza’s past *and* her future. She knocks Liza into shape(lessness), the shape of her coarse, maltreated, childbearing and miscarrying future. Meting out a most dreadful battering, Mrs Blakeston is as much a ‘fiend’ in her rage as slum husbands are ‘demonds’ in their wife-beating intoxication (69, 136).

⁶⁶ Gould, pp. 126-7.

⁶⁷ David G. Horn, *The Criminal Body: Lombroso and the Anatomy of Deviance* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 38.

An earlier, less alarming description of Mrs Blakeston – of her dowdy, ageing surfaces – informs the reader that, ‘She wore a black cloak and a funny, old-fashioned black bonnet; [...] a middle-sized, stout person anywhere between thirty and forty years old. She had a large, fat face with a big mouth, and her hair was curiously done, parted in the middle and plastered down on each side of the head in little plaits’ (41-2). To Liza, measuring time in regard to fashion, the older woman’s hair seems ‘curiously done’; Mrs Blakeston, in her outmoded ephemera, is at risk of desertion by her philandering husband (42). Intriguingly, her appearance finds an echo in a description of photographic portraits hanging in Liza’s home: ‘[T]here were portraits innumerable – little yellow cartes-de-visite in velvet frames, some of which were covered with shells; they showed strange people, with old-fashioned clothes. [...] stern-featured females with hair carefully parted in the middle and plastered down on each side, firm chins and mouths, with small, pig-like eyes and wrinkled faces’ (92). These figures, ‘self-consciously fixed for ever in their stiff discomfort’, are phantoms defined by a repulsive physicality (92). They bear a physiognomic and sartorial kinship to Mrs Blakeston, making her the living embodiment of what is, or should be, dead. Yet those inorganic images have been rendered possible, and the past made visible to Liza’s eyes, by modern scientific processes. While their appearance is rendered alien by the rapid changes which have occurred in massified fashion, the portraits are displayed among the fruits of technological innovation and modern systems of circulation. These include illustrations from magazines, and trinkets bearing the names of resorts such as Margate and Clacton, testifying to a series of Bank Holiday excursions.

Liza will never enjoy another Bank Holiday. Following her fight with Mrs Blakeston, the narrative fabricates a very different heroine. Bloodied and grimy, she is rescued and taken to her room by her faithful suitor, Tom. There she promptly refuses

his offer of marriage, but, sliding into his lap, offers herself to him as reward for his kindness. Her status as sexualized, debased body is confirmed as she reveals that she is pregnant.⁶⁸ Thereafter, as Liza accepts spirits from her mother, the narrator carefully locates her in a chain of alcoholism and violence. She now descends rapidly into the very image of the 'shapeless sluttishness' typically associated with slum mothers by elite writers.⁶⁹ When Mrs Kemp discusses Liza's long-dead father – a 'Radical' who believed in serving the 'British Hempire' by imposing multiple childbirth on his wife – it is apparent that the injuries meted out to Liza by Mrs Blakeston reproduce closely those meted out to her mother by her father 'when me an' your poor father 'ad words' (148-1522). And there are notes of heredity. Mrs Kemp recognises and approves her daughter's disorder – the result of sudden, catastrophic assault - ascribing it to their biological relationship, a relationship cemented through a shared, drunken rendition of music-hall numbers such as *Daisy, Daisy*:

'Ah, Liza,' she remarked, 'you're a chip off the old block [...]/You'll 'ave a family one day, Liza, an' I shouldn't wonder if you didn't 'ave as many as me [thirteen]/ [...] I can see you're my daughter now,' said Mrs Kemp. 'When you used ter round on me I used ter think as 'ow if I 'adn't carried yer for nine months, it must 'ave been some mistike, an' yer wasn't my daughter at all' [...] [Liza's dress] was all disarranged; her face covered with the scars of scratches, and clots of blood had fixed under her nose; her eye had swollen up so that it was nearly closed, and red; her hair was hanging over her face and shoulders, and she laughed stupidly and leered with heavy, sodden ugliness./ [...] She shouted out the tunes, beating time on the table, and her mother, grinning, with her thin, grey hair hanging dishevelled over her head, joined in with her weak, cracked voice (150-153).

The physicality which Liza has displayed throughout the novel reaches its culmination, as her vitiated form is seized by extreme thirst and swings in temperature, producing the spasms and sweats common to sexual intercourse, to childbirth and to

⁶⁸ The spicing of a fight between females with the element of pregnancy, reminiscent of 'Badalia Herodsfoot', is extended by Mrs Blakeston's simultaneous public declaration of her own pregnancy. Like the pregnant Jenny in Kipling's narrative, Mrs Blakeston then upbraids her husband in an appeal for sympathy: "I've bore 'im nine children, yer say nothin' of a miscarriage, an' I've got another one comin', an' thet's 'ow 'e treats me!" (143).

⁶⁹ Keating *Working Classes*, p. 174.

the throes of death.⁷⁰ She dreams of multiplication; not of the ‘infinite baby’, but of an accounts ledger, and of an army of inflated Mrs Blakestons: ‘Mrs Blakeston grew enormous in size, and multiplied, so that every way she turned the figure confronted her’ (157). Liza, screaming out ‘in the anguish of her labour’ (159) miscarries, generating biological material which cannot live. Where Gissing’s slum infants are living, breathing abortions, where Badalia attends to excremental spawn, where violence results in Lizerunt’s premature delivery of a skull-faced manikin, here in Maugham’s Vere Street, Liza’s perspiring, puckering body fails to deliver life at all. The waste of human potential and morbidity perceived in the slum is coded as abortion, but the metaphor, the analogy, is literalized.

This dark expulsion leads to Liza’s own expulsion from Vere Street. As she lies dying, only Tom, and Jim (who, reverting to type, as it were, has beaten and throttled his pregnant wife in front of his terrified children) express love for Lizer.⁷¹ By contrast, Mrs Kemp and Mrs Hodges, a neighbour with nursing experience, discuss insurance and funeral details in the callous way typical of elite depictions of slum mothers.⁷² Thus, once more, the decline-plot of the factory worker and that of the prostitute intersect: From sexually alluring figure in a lilac dress to ignominious, drink-sodden death, it seems, is a mere matter of months. When Mrs Hodges recounts how she has seen another woman die in recent days, she underscores at Lizer’s deathbed the social stigma attached to prostitution: ‘Of course the other one- well, she was only a prostitute, so it didn’t so much matter. It ain’t like another woman, is it? [...] Still, one don’t like ‘em to die, even if they are thet. One mustn’t be too ‘ard on ‘em’ (165). Meanwhile, Lizer’s mother agrees with every word Mrs Kemp utters.

⁷⁰ Bakhtin, p. 354.

⁷¹ Suggestions that Blakeston refuses to leave his wife for Liza and abandons her (Henkle and Bivona, p. 123; Francis, p. 64) are incorrect.

⁷² Martin, pp. 152-158.

While the figure of the prostitute overlies that of the dying girl, the tumescent, hideous form of the grotesque body and the vulgar, morbid working-class body are drawn together as surely as they were at Gissing's Crystal Palace. When Mrs Kemp reminisces about the preparations for her late husband's burial, she spells out a rather troubling reconciliation. The reader learns of the violent repression of the daddy of all slum bodies: Mr Kemp, the man who saw exhausting multiparity as the embodiment of imperial vigour, was at last reduced to a doughy mess as gruesome as any slum abortion, pummelled into unrecognisability as violently as the face of any slum wife, and, thus contained, was returned to the earth. He was trampled down by his own wife:

'You know 'e 'ad dropsy, an' 'e swell up – oh, 'e did swell; 'is own mother wouldn't 'ave known 'im. Why, 'is leg swell up till it was as big round as 'is body. [... Mr Browning] sent the coffin up, an' we got my old man in, but we couldn't get the lid down, he was so swell up. Well, Mr Brownin', 'e was a great big man, thirteen stone if 'e was a ounce. Well, 'e stood on the coffin, an' a young man 'e 'ad with 'im stood on it too, an' the lid simply wouldn't go dahn; so Mr Brownin', 'e said, 'Jump on missus,' so I stood on it, an' we all jumped, an' at last we got to, an' screwed it; but, lor', we did 'ave a job; I shall never forget it' (170-171).

The phantasmagoric female consumer is pummelled into a shapelessness which is simultaneously hereditary, her body drained of the poisons of synthetic and organic seduction only in death. As I have argued, then, for Maugham and the other slum novelists discussed in this thesis, where women are concerned, modernity breeds abortion. Reading slum fictions in the context of concepts provided by Walter Benjamin and feminist critics – from the perspective of consumption – discloses a coding of phantasmagoric cultures in terms of the physical and spiritual degeneration of impoverished women. This thesis has traced that coding from Walter Besant's *Stepney Green* to W. Somerset Maugham's *Lambeth*. As I now turn to my Conclusion, I ask whether I might build productively upon the rich insights I have gained though a

revision of my critical lens. I point towards a discursive frameworks relating to body, appetite and autonomy and consider how these might assist in sharpening my analysis of images of the desiring and grotesque female body in commodity capitalism.

Conclusion

I developed the idea for this thesis through a growing frustration with the terms of debate regarding women's contestation of public space at the close of the nineteenth century, and the Introduction to my thesis, and the chapters which follow, reflect my initial route into the topic. It was apparent from my reading of texts of sociology, and fictions by authors such as George Gissing and Margaret Harkness, that representations of impoverished women moving through the metropolis to engage with commodity cultures were commonplace at the fin de siècle. Yet the cultural-historical analyses which I accessed tended to focus overwhelmingly on the experiences and representations of privileged women as social workers, administrators, and consumers, detailing the ways in which they were 'Associated by gender with the very emblems of poverty, disease, and fallenness [...] in the urban scene.'¹ As the sexuality of impoverished women was often framed by Victorian commentators in terms of deviance, and the female labourer – however 'feminine' her occupation – was marked by her engagement with the economic forces of the city, I wondered why there was not more scholarship exploring the ways in which impoverished women who promenaded and shopped were linked, metonymically or otherwise, with disease and prostitution.

Reading feminist scholarship on the urban and consumerism, I made a number of suggestive connections between the commodity, the figure of the prostitute, urban disease, and sites of bodily and urban excess and decay. I realised that further exploration promised a means of illuminating elite structures of thought regarding impoverished women's associations with the commodity and indulgence in the city's commercial pleasures. Taking my lead from the texts which had prompted my original

¹ Nord, *Walking*, p.12.

insights – the writing of scholars such as Rita Felski and Deborah Epstein Nord, the superb explication of Walter Benjamin’s work by Susan Buck Morss - I approached various texts describing working-class women from the perspective of consumption.

The resulting thesis has excavated obscure scenes of violence, identified a veritable aetiology of consumption and degeneration, and highlighted images of female monstrosity common to late-Victorian tales of decadence and horror, and to representations of slum femininity. It provides a good deal of fresh, and potentially important, work. But I have attempted to address a set of intersecting themes which could provide the basis for two or more closely-related projects – but which prove difficult to digest and develop when crowded into one thesis. In some places, the theoretical models I employ afford insufficient pertinence and flexibility to develop my analysis in the profound ways I desire. More consistent incorporation of both contemporaneous discourses and recent scholarship on the relationship between ideology and the body, are needed in order to balance the existing Benjaminian approach. Better-defined frameworks for the exploration of relations between personal, specialist, and popular symbolisms and understandings of disease, would assist in achieving greater clarity and control across the whole thesis.

My opening chapter, in which I undertake a close reading of Walter Besant’s novel *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882), illustrates these issues well. For example, the chapter begins by locating the novel within a context of missionary aestheticism, but this approach is not pursued with any coherence or prominence, resulting in a reading of colourful mass-produced fashion which is disconnected from any discussion of aesthetic dress. Nevertheless, this discussion of fashion draws on a range of contemporary sources, and offers the possible groundwork for a concentrated

study of an economy of labour and leisure, examining the needlewoman in terms of production and consumption. Such an analysis would be possible within a restructured, or different, project.

Meanwhile, Chapter One introduces a number of themes and tropes, central to my argument that exposure to commodity cultures was commonly figured in terms of spiritual and physical degeneration in elite texts at the *fin de siècle*. Delving into the gothic legacy of the prostitute and the needlewoman, this strand of discussion provides stimulating insights into the presence in Besant's novel of 'loud' and sexualized needlewomen. However, the exploration of images of bodily horror in relation to commodification, which forms the thematic spine of my thesis, would benefit from clear initial definition of key terms such as 'gothic' and 'grotesque.' Thus, while my Introduction presents a detailed account of the Benjaminian perspectives involved in my argument, there is relatively little clarity where my treatment of the body is concerned.

The second chapter, addressing Annie Besant's representations of matchwomen during the 1888 strike at the Bryant and May factory, constitutes an intriguing point of comparison with the work of her brother-in-law Walter Besant. My study of Annie Besant's use of tropes of prostitution and toxic ingestion develops some core themes with great intensity, but the discussion of the match women's visit to Westminster highlights how much is lost through rushed analysis. I mention Annie Besant's connection with the Malthusian League, but do not pause to consider her complex discussion of the matchwomen's powers of articulation in the context of eugenic discourses – mobilized by socialists as well as socially conservative commentators

during this period.² Annie Besant was an unusual public figure, writing at a point of crisis for the matchwomen, and of expansion for the trades union movement. To look again at this material through the lens of eugenics may result in an arresting contribution to labour history.

Despite an effective use of embryological paradigms, discussion of the eugenic context is also absent from the final two chapters of the thesis, which trace a dynamic of destruction through exposure to urban aesthetics by attending to the figure of the embryo or abortion. The overarching theoretical concept of Chapters Seven and Eight is that of the carnivalesque body, which is employed almost exclusively in relation to formulations by Mikhail Bakhtin, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White. Recent scholarship, however, has provided approaches which may prove more relevant and serviceable for the exploration of vivid slum fictions. Nuanced interpretive frameworks have been employed to consider the complex entanglement of the non-normative or carnivalesque body in key cultural debates, particularly in relation to science and gender. It is through attention to elegant studies available in this field, in combination with the study of precise medical accounts of the female body, that I aim to more fully contextualize, and thus to re-conceptualize, the figuring of the female body in late-Victorian slum narratives.³

In Chapter Three, I examine feminist and shareholder narratives of Bryant and May in the context of anxiety around ‘dangerous trades’ during the 1890s. Although this chapter addresses an interesting selection of texts, it is too ‘crammed’, and there is

² Michael Freeden, ‘Eugenics and Progressive Thought: A Study in Ideological Affinity’, *The Historical Journal* 22 (1979), 645-671; Diane Paul, ‘Eugenics and the Left’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984), 567-590.

³ For example, recent collections such as: *Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences*, ed. by Aileen Fyfe and Bernard Lightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); *Popular Exhibitions, Science, and Showmanship, 1840-1910*, ed. by Joe Kember, John Plunkett and Jill A. Sullivan (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012).

little sense of connection with the preceding discussion of Annie Besant. Nor is there a sense of consistency as I move from the discussion of the texts produced by Millicent Fawcett and Helen Dallas, to the latter section of Chapter Three, which explores an article written by Lloyd Lester for *The Girl's Own Paper* in 1895. This is because the analytical framework which I employ for reading Lester's article draws upon scholarship of the public exhibition of deviant and labouring bodies in the nineteenth century, and particularly of the imperial and commercial exhibition of bodies at the fin de siècle. The result is that the two sections read as if they have been taken from separate projects.

The study of Lester's narrative proves most suggestive, yet seems curiously abstracted from the context in which the article was actually produced. This, I think, is owing to too 'solid' a rehearsal of theoretical and cultural scholarship, which obscures rather than frames my analysis. My discussion could be 'freed up' by direct reference to other primary texts describing labouring and commercially exhibited bodies. Again, I could learn from the strategies employed in recent scholarship addressing the centrality of the spectacular and grotesque body to cultural understandings. Of particular relevance in re-drafting this chapter would be studies exploring the links between different modes of representation, and the marketing and exoticization, of non-normative bodies.⁴

Chapter Four presents original archive work with the Booth Collection, interrogating texts written by late-Victorian social investigators in what I trust is a fresh and enjoyable way. As with other chapters, however, the discussion would

⁴ Robert Bogdan, *Freakshow: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988); Tom Cheeseman, 'Modernity/Monstrosity: Eating Freaks (Germany c.1700)', *Body and Society* 2:3 (1996), 1-31.

benefit from less ‘galloping’ through arguments, and more reflective historicization. It is symptomatic of the congested and theoretically untidy aspects of my thesis that, in focusing on the ‘meaning’ of the conduct of the manager of a club for factory workers, I do not pause to unpack more comprehensively the references to diet, appetite and the restoration of gender norms noted by the Booth associate A.L. Baxter. A broader, more sustained engagement with discourses around bodily display and the symbolic importance of food would allow for a more stimulating discussion whose importance to the main themes of the thesis would be readily apparent.

The second part of my thesis, examining slum fictions which objectify women in terms of consumption and disease, begins with a close reading of Margaret Harkness’s novel *A City Girl* (1887). The opening pages of Chapter Five provide an account of the theories of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin regarding the reception of mass culture. This introduction congests the chapter, and results in a sense of ‘sudden’ importation of theoretical concepts. These concepts do in fact chime with the Benjaminian aspects of my analysis, but, once more, the theoretical element is presented in such a way that it presents an obstacle to the reader’s sense of the overarching argument. My close reading of *A City Girl* is imaginative, and lays the groundwork for a potentially significant study. However, letting go of the initial theoretical ‘stodge’ and exploring some of the contemporary discourses circulating around the different cultural forms appearing in Harkness’s fiction - for example, melodrama – might allow for the development of other, closely-connected, arguments about the body and zones of leisure.

Chapter Six examines George Gissing’s novel *The Nether World* (1889) in terms of the relationship between its scenes of alluring commercial spectacle, and its

imagery of female pathology and horror. In the course of the chapter I attend at length to Gissing's depiction of Clara Hewett as she works at Mrs Tubbs's bar, becoming increasingly ill. Clara does not strictly manifest the indications of any single condition as described in contemporary medical texts. Indeed, it is the very indefinition of Gissing's description that renders Clara's illness open to a reading in relation to what I have termed a figurative 'phantasmagoric infection' – the damage wreaked upon Clara's body by the city's devolutionary forces. Yet approaching Gissing's narrative through the lens of *precise* epistemological accounts would enhance my analysis on a number of levels.

Now I will complete my Conclusion with a brief consideration of past and contemporary understandings of food refusal. Studies of the emaciated body as commercial-scientific spectacle, and of the emaciated body in terms of modern eating disorders, do sometimes overlap.⁵ Comparable points might be made about conditions such as hysteria; but food refusal is selected here as a means to pull together important themes emerging from my reflections upon my work, and to indicate the ways in which I might develop concepts of the body as theatre of transformation and control when revisiting this thesis, and when shaping future projects.

To return to Gissing's representation of Clara Hewett, among the other particulars of her illness, the text of *The Nether World* remarks the following: 'Her body wasted so that all the garments she wore were loose upon her [...] her cheeks had sunk, her eyes were unnaturally dark, there was something worse than the familiar self-

⁵ Most suggestive in this area, analysing apparently disparate phenomena from sociological rather than psychological perspectives, is Sigal Gooldin, 'Fasting Women, Living Skeletons and Hunger Artists: Spectacles of Body and Miracles at the Turn of the Century' in *Body and Society* 9:2 (2003), 27-53.

will about the mouth.⁶ This thesis has been concerned with feminine desire and the urban, and with conceptions of the female body as site and representative of social change. However, in the face of this detail regarding Clara's shocking weight loss, and for all that my analysis links Clara Hewett to representations of the New Woman and the vampire as emaciated grotesques, mention of anorexia nervosa is relegated to a footnote.

Overall, in its description of Clara's 'less womanly' suffering, its account of her sense of 'unscrupulous rebellion,' her hysteria, her bouts of euphoria, and her appetite loss in the midst of material plenty, the novel does present symptoms commonly noted in fin-de-siècle diagnoses of neurasthenia, chlorosis and anorexia nervosa.⁷ These conditions were linked in medical and popular discourses to mental morbidity, with disordered sexuality – with the womb. And it is in contemporary accounts of these conditions that social transformations and anxieties are made manifest.

The symptoms of chlorosis, a condition diagnosed in young women in the nineteenth, and into the twentieth, century, intersected with those of neurasthenia and anaemia, and included alternate states of debility and agitation. Chlorosis also shared some symptoms with anorexia nervosa: chlorotic women often starved themselves, and might also display appetites regarded as abnormal. Linked by doctors with sexual frustration, chlorosis has no precise modern symptomatic equivalent.⁸ It was a gender- and class-specific ailment, viewed as a product of the unhealthy environments in which impoverished women tended to work. It was understood as a problem of urban

⁶ Gissing *Nether World*, pp. 88-92.

⁷ Gissing, *Nether World*, p. 86.

⁸ I.S.L. Loudon, 'Chlorosis, Anaemia, and Anorexia Nervosa' *British Medical Journal* 281 (1980), 1669-1675; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, 'Chlorotic Girls, 1870-1920: A Historical Perspective on Female Adolescence', *Child Development* 53 (1982), 1468-1477.

sexuality, and operated across the paradoxes of femininity: as Joan Jacobs Brumberg observes, the chlorotic female was conceived by doctors as being ‘simultaneously diseased, fertile and attractive.’⁹ Careful exploration of contemporary specialist and popular discourses regarding this and other illnesses might serve to open up the text of *The Nether World* in relation to female corporeality, urban danger and class mobility – that is, to the ways in which the female body of emaciation and ‘perverted’ appetite manifests particular social shifts and anxieties.

Medical definitions, institutional structures and remedies are culturally produced – the outcome of complex social and scientific processes. Anorexia nervosa, identified as a discrete order of neurosis in the early 1870s, was interpreted as a by-product of urbanization, associated by doctors with the bourgeois domestic environment, and conceptualized in terms of deviant female willpower. Unsurprisingly, despite the development of dedicated treatment strategies for the disease at the fin de siècle, some doctors ‘subsumed their discussions of the phenomenon within more general investigations of aberrant and intractable female behaviour.’¹⁰ Clearly, Gissing represents Clara in terms of just such ‘aberrant and intractable female behaviour’, merging in her figure food refusal, hysteria and heredity. In its collapsing of questions of neurology into questions of appropriate femininity, in its reading of interior health through the survey of female flesh, Gissing’s narrative also shares a physiognomic logic with late-Victorian specialist accounts of anorexia in which the control of starvation effectively stood for the management of the patient’s sexuality.¹¹

⁹ Brumberg ‘Chlorotic’, p.1472.

¹⁰ Erin O’Connor, ‘Pictures of Health: Medical Photography and the Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 (1995), 535-572.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 543-547.

For some years, feminists and cultural historians have sought to counter medical accounts of anorexia, by locating the disease within a broader social and cultural context, attending in a variety of ways to motivational or psychological issues. Of course, for centuries, women and girls have exerted control over their bodies through food refusal. While some commentators suggest a psychological correlation between those women who starved themselves in pre-industrial societies, and those suffering from anorexia nervosa, others maintain that anorexia should be understood as a modern disease contingent on specific social and cultural contexts.¹² The fact that the diagnosis of anorexia nervosa coincided with the emergence of modern forms of commodity culture, and with nascent developments in professional opportunities for women, has been read by some academics as evidence of tension between what commodity capitalism promises, and the lack of equal opportunities that actually exist for women.¹³ Recent models of the disease are often discussed by feminist critics in terms of both resistance and conformity to dominant notions of femininity, in the context the circulation of mass-produced images of ideal beauty.¹⁴ What broadly unites cultural-historical, feminist and psycho-analytical approaches to eating disorders

¹² Employing a range of perspectives, texts arguing that culturally-specific analyses of anorexia nervosa can prove limiting include: Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (London: University of California Press, 1993); Melanie a. Katzman and Sing Lee, 'Beyond Body Image: The Integration of Feminist and Transcultural Theories in the Understanding of Self-Starvation', *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 22 (1997), 385-394. Texts emphasizing specific cultural and epistemological context in the emergence of models of anorexia nervosa include, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

¹³ Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*; Bordo; Brett Silverstein and Deborah Perlick, *The Cost of Competence: Why Inequality Causes Depression, Eating Disorders and Illness in Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue: The Anti-Diet Guide to Permanent Weight Loss* (London: Paddington Press, 1978); Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as Metaphor for our Age* (London: Faber, 1986); Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1990); Bordo; Catrina Brown and Karin Jasper, 'Introduction: Why Weight? Why Women? Why Now?' in *Consuming Passions: Feminist Approaches to Weight Preoccupation and Eating Disorders* ed by Catrina Brown and Karin Jasper (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1993), pp.16-35; Helen M. Malson and Jane M. Ussher, 'Beyond this Mortal Coil: Femininity, Death and Discursive Constructions of the Anorexic Body', *Mortality* 2 (1997), 43-61.

including anorexia nervosa, is a concern with issues of assertion and communication, and an acknowledgement of the symbolic importance of appetite control.

Late-Victorian discourses of anorexia, and scholarship addressing manifestations and treatment of the disease since the 1870s, have clear relevance to my thesis in its examination of women's attempts to achieve autonomy in the city, the relations between the body and urban dreamworlds, and images of female monstrosity. This is not least, because anorexia has been conceptualized by feminist thinkers in terms of the simultaneous internalization and rejection of archetypal images of Woman as voracious consumer.¹⁵ That anorexia emerged in a society culture marked by very different ideals of beauty, but experiencing for the first time the mass circulation of photographs of glamorous femininity, is also intriguing.

In Chapter Two, my thesis mobilized crowd theory and culturally-common images of the revolutionary Medusa-figure in order to explore Annie Besant's account of an attack by Bryant and May matchwomen on a statue of Gladstone in Bow. In Chapter Six, having discussed Clara Hewett's physical symptoms in relation to phantasmagoric cultures and the general social-medicinal context, I made a connection between her described pathology, and the violence employed during subsequent suffragette activities. Indeed, I quoted Elaine Showalter: 'In a sense, the elements of hunger, rebellion, and rage latent in the phenomenon of nervous disorder became explicit and externalized in the tactics of the suffrage campaign.'¹⁶ Reading studies of food refusal and of the Victorian commercial carnivalesque, I begin to see more

¹⁵ Bordo, pp. 160-161; Liz Bondi and Erica Burman, 'Women and Mental Health: A Feminist Review', *Feminist Review* 68 (2001), 6-33 (p.8).

¹⁶ Showalter, *Female Malady*, p. 162.

profound connections between these scenes, and between other representations of women and the urban.

An unsubtle reading of feminist discourses might result in the impression that anorexic women are being portrayed as engaging in conscious political protest. As Anna Krugovoy Silver asserts, 'Equating the victims of a disease with feminist hunger-strikers at the turn of the century or with feminist activists today is both misleading and irresponsible.'¹⁷ Yet to consider the ways in which these phenomena might be connected, and the cultural affiliations between their representation in medical and popular discourses, is not to equate them. It is to acknowledge that, where food refusal is concerned, the female body has been, and is, a site of social and personal conflict, control and communication. Indeed, as Bea Brockman notes, whether employed as a political weapon, or occurring at the level of the family, as self-harm or as symptom of mental illness, 'Food refusal is a communication.'¹⁸

In the early decades of the twentieth century, forced feeding of Suffragette hunger strikers was justified in law on the grounds that the person refusing food was threatening to commit the felony of suicide.¹⁹ Those suffragettes engaged in this form of protest might also be perceived as mentally disturbed, and thus compared to anorexic women and to patients in asylums who refused food. For example, one doctor was quoted in *The British Medical Journal* as follows: 'If an otherwise healthy

¹⁷ Anna Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.18.

¹⁸ Bea Brockman, 'Food Refusal in Prisoners: A Communication or a Method of Self-Killing? The Role of the Psychiatrist and Resulting Ethical Challenges', *Journal of Medical Ethics* 25 (1999), 451-456 (p.451).

¹⁹ Victor Horsley and others, *The British Medical Journal* (hereafter *BMJ*), 1: 2559 (1910), 173-174; Chas Mercier and G. Archdall Reid, *BMJ* 1 (1910), 291-292; A.G. Bateman and others, 'Forcible Feeding of Suffragette Prisoners', *BMJ*, 2 (1912), 821-823; 'Forcible Feeding', *BMJ*, 2 (1916), 62. Some medics did oppose forced feeding of suffragettes, for a variety of reasons. See J. Price Williams, James W. McIntosh and Ettie Sayer, *BMJ* 2 (1912), 907-908.

prisoner refuses food to the injury of her health and danger to her life, she is without doubt temporarily insane [...] the mind is unhinged, and the individual must be guarded against herself.²⁰ Over the intervening century, the emphasis in law and medical practice has shifted towards nuanced consideration of the autonomy to which a self-starving prisoner is entitled, once mental competence has been established: since the 1970s, instances of the subjection of prisoners in British jails to artificial feeding have been vanishingly few. The position in regard to those suffering from anorexia is, understandably, rather different, as the anorectic's food refusal is viewed by doctors as the symptom of a life-threatening disorder.²¹

These are complex and delicate issues. My challenge is to work with primary sources and the most appropriate scholarship, to examine the cultural forces which produced particular disorders, acts of self-harm and violence, and radical political protest, in Victorian and Edwardian women. My aim, in part, is to revisit women's engagement with the city's commodity cultures – their consumerism - with one eye on the self-starving body. It is likely that my thesis will in time develop into more than one project. But one thing is certain: the scholarship of the freak show, and the archives of the hospital and the prison, are excellent places to begin.

²⁰ 'Fasting Prisoners and Compulsory Feeding', *BMJ* 2 (1909) , 1175-1176. The quotation is from a letter sent to the journal by C.V.H. Nesbit, a doctor.

²¹ Brockman; 'The Law and Force-Feeding', *BMJ* 2 (1974), 737-738; 'Force-Feeding in Prison', *BMJ* 2 (1976), 823-824.

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